POLLY OF LADY GAY COTTAGE

EMMA C. DOWD

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From

Clara Bell Keyhoe

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POLLY OF LADY GAY COTTAGE

I WANT TO GO!

POLLY
OF LADY GAY COTTAGE

BY

EMMA C. DOWD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO
MY CRITIC, COUNSELOR
AND COMRADE

CONTENTS

I.	The Rosewood Box	1
II.	Leonora's Wonderful News	12
III.	A Whiff of Slander	20
IV.	Cousins	36
V.	A Monopolist and a Fanfaron	46
VI.	"Not for Sale"	66
VII.	The Blizzard	73
VIII.	The Intermediate Birthday Party	89
IX.	The Eighth Rose	105
X.	A Visit from Erastus Bean	119
XI.	Uncle Maurice at Lady Gay Cottage	125
XII.	Little Chris	138
XIII.	Ilga Barron	152
XIV.	Polly in New York	165
XV.	An Unexpected Guest	175
XVI.	Roses and Thorns	184
XVII.	A Summer Night Mystery	194
XVIII.	At Midvale Springs	212
XIX.	Two Letters	237
XX.	Mrs. Jocelyn's Dinner-Party	250

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CHAPTER I

THE ROSEWOOD BOX

THE telephone bell cut sharp into Polly's story.

She was recounting one of the merry hours that Mrs. Jocelyn had given to her and Leonora, while Dr. Dudley and his wife were taking their wedding journey. Still dimpling with laughter, she ran across to the instrument; but as she turned back from the message her face was troubled.

"Father says I am to come right over to the hospital," she told her mother. "Mr. Bean — you know, the one that married Aunt Jane — has got hurt, and he wants to see me. I hope he is n't going to die. He was real good to me that time I was there, as good as he dared to be."

"I will go with you," Mrs. Dudley decided.

And, locking the house, they went out into the early evening darkness.

The physician was awaiting them in his office.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Polly anxiously. "What does he want to see me for?"

"We are afraid of internal injury," was the grave answer. "He was on his way to you when the car struck him."

"To me?" Polly exclaimed.

"He was fetching a little box that belonged to your mother. Do you recollect it — a small rosewood box?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "I'd forgotten all about it — there's a wreath of tiny pearl flowers on the cover!"

The Doctor nodded.

"Mr. Bean seems to attach great value to the box or its contents."

"Oh, what is in it?"

"I don't know. But he kept tight hold of it even after he was knocked down, and it was the first thing he called for when he regained consciousness. I thought he had bet-

ter defer seeing you until to-morrow morning; but he would n't hear to it. So I let him have his own way."

"Have you sent word to Aunt Jane?" inquired Polly, instinctively shrinking from contact with the woman in whose power she had lived through those dreadful years.

Dr. Dudley gave a smiling negative. "He begged me not to let her know."

"I don't blame him!" Polly burst out. "I guess he's glad to get away from her, if he did have to be hurt to do it."

"Probably he wishes first to make sure that the box is in your hands," observed the Doctor, rising. "She will have to be notified. Come, we will go upstairs. The sooner the matter is off Mr. Bean's mind, the better."

Polly was dismayed at sight of the little man's face. In their whiteness his pinched features seemed more wizen than ever. But his smile of welcome was eager.

"How do you do, my dear? My dear!" the wiry hand was extended with evident pain.

Polly squeezed it sympathetically, and

told him how sorry she was for his accident.

Mr. Bean gazed at her with tender, wistful eyes.

"My little girl was 'most as big as you," he mused. "Not quite; she was n't but six when she — went. But you look consider'ble like her — wish 't I had a picture o' Susie! I wish 't I had!" He drew his breath hard.

Polly patted the wrinkled hand, not knowing what to say.

"But I've got a picture here you'll like," the little man brightened. "Yer'll like it first-rate."

His hand moved gropingly underneath the bed covers, and finally brought out the little box that Polly instantly recognized.

"Oh, thank you! How pretty it is!" She received it with a radiant smile.

Mr. Bean's face grew suddenly troubled.

"Yer must n't blame Jane too much," he began pleadingly. "I guess she kind o' dassent give it to yer, so long afterwards. It's locked," — as Polly pulled at the cover, — "and there ain't no key," he mourned. "I do' know what Jane's done with it. Yer'll

have to git another, — there wa'n't no other way." His voice was plaintive.

"That's all right," Polly reassured him.

The pleasure of once more holding the little box in her hand was enough for the moment.

"I see it in her bureau drawer the day we was first married," he went on reminiscently, "an' she opened it and showed me what was in it. Ther' 's a picture of yer mother —"

"Oh!" Polly interrupted excitedly, "of mamma?"

"Yis, so she said. Looks like you, too, — same kind o' eyes. It was goin' to be for your birthday — that's what she had it took for, Jane said."

Polly had been breathlessly following his words, and now broke out in sudden reproach: —

"Oh! why did n't Aunt Jane let me have it! How could she keep it, when I wanted a picture of mamma so!"

The reply did not come at once. A shadow of pain passed over the man's face, leaving it more drawn and pallid.

"It's too bad!" he lamented weakly. "I tol' Jane so then; but she thought 't would kind o' upset yer, likely, and so —" His voice faltered. He began again bravely. "You must n't blame Jane too much, my dear! Jane's got some good streaks, real good streaks."

Polly looked up from the little box. Her eyes were wet, but she smiled cheerfully into the anxious face.

"I ought not to blame her, now she's sent it," she said sweetly; "and I thank you ever so much for bringing it."

A hint of a smile puckered the thin lips.

"Guess if I'd waited f'r her to send it," he murmured, "'t 'ud been the mornin' Gabriel come! But Jane's got her good streaks," he apologized musingly.

Then he lay silent for a moment, feeling after courage to go on.

"Ther' 's a letter, too," he finally hazarded. "Jane said it was about some rich relations o' yours somewher's — I forgit where. She said likely they would n't care nothin' 'bout you, seein' 's they never 'd known yer, and it would only put false notions into yer head,

and so she did n't" — he broke off, his eyes pleading forgiveness for the woman whose "good streaks" needed constant upholding.

But Polly was quite overlooking Aunt Jane. This astonishing bit of news had thrown her mind into a tumult, and she breathlessly awaited additional items.

They were slow in coming, and she grew impatient.

"What relatives are they?" she prodded. "Papa's, or mamma's?"

Mr. Bean could not positively say. He had not read the letter, and recollected little that his wife had told him.

"Seems kind o' 's if they was Mays," he mused; "but I ain't noways sure. Anyhow they was millionaires, Jane said she guessed, and she was afraid 't 'ud spile yer to go and live with 'em, —"

At this juncture Dr. Dudley interposed, his fingers trying his patient's pulse.

"No more visiting to-night," he smiled, yet the smile was grave and of short life.

Polly went away directly, carrying the little rosewood box, after again expressing her grateful thanks to Mr. Bean.

Down in the office her tongue ran wild, until her mother was quite as excited as she. But there was a difference; Polly's wondering thoughts flew straight to her lips, Mrs. Dudley's stayed in her heart, restless and fearsome.

Next morning the injured man seemed no worse, though the physicians still had grave doubts of his recovery. Dr. Dudley, while appreciating Mr. Bean's kind intentions towards Polly, and putting out of account the serious accident, grimly wished to himself that the little man had suffered the rosewood box to remain hidden in his wife's bureau drawer. Of course, Polly was legally his own, yet these unknown relatives of hers, — with what convincing arguments might they confront him, arguments which he could not honestly refute! Yet he carried the box to the locksmith's, and he conjectured cheerfully with Polly regarding the contents of the letter.

Late in the afternoon he put both box and key into Polly's hands.

"Oh!" she squealed delightedly. "Have you opened it?"

"Most certainly not. That pleasure is left for you."

She eagerly placed the key in the lock, and carefully raised the cover.

A folded tissue paper lay on top, which she caught up, and the photograph was disclosed.

"Mamma!" she half sobbed, pressing the picture to her lips.

But Dr. Dudley scarcely noticed her emotion, for the displacement of the card had revealed only an empty box — the letter was gone! He looked across at his wife, and their eyes met in perfect understanding. The moment they had both dreaded was postponed, and they felt a sudden relief. Still, there had been a letter, the Doctor silently reasoned, and sooner or later its contents must be faced.

"See!" Polly was holding before him the portrait of a lovely, girlish woman, with dark, thoughtful eyes and beautiful, curving mouth.

"It looks just like her!" came in tremulous tones. "Is n't she sweet?" She leaned lightly against her father, drawing a long breath of joy and sorrow.

As he threw his arm about her, the Doctor could feel her efforts to be calm.

"But where's the letter?" she asked, with sudden recollection, turning from their satisfying praise of the one she loved, to gaze into the empty box. She regarded it disappointedly when she heard the truth.

"Now I shan't ever know," she lamented, "whether I have any grandfather or grandmother, or uncles or aunts, — or anybody! And I thought, may be,there'd be some cousins too! But, then," she went on cheerfully, "it is n't as if the letter was from somebody I'd ever known. I'm glad it is that that's lost, instead of this," clasping the photograph to her heart.

Mrs. Dudley glanced over to her husband. "Better not tell her!" his eyes said, and her own agreed. It seemed that Polly did not dream of what was undoubtedly the case, — that the letter was from her mother, written as a birthday accompaniment to the picture, and giving hitherto withheld information concerning her kindred.

It was far better for Polly's peace of heart that the probable truth was not even sur-

mised, and presently she carried the photograph up to her own little room, there to feast her eyes upon the well-remembered face until time was forgotten.

CHAPTER II

LEONORA'S WONDERFUL NEWS

"POLLY!"

Dr. Dudley waited at the foot of the short staircase. He had just come in from an early morning visit to a hospital patient.

"Yes, father," floated down to him, followed by a scurry of light feet in the corridor overhead.

Directly Polly appeared at the top of the flight, one side of her hair in soft, smooth curls, the other a mass of fluffy waves.

"Leonora sent word for you to come over 'just as soon as you possibly can,'" smiled the Doctor. "She has something to tell you."

"I don't see what it can be," replied Polly. "Do you know, father?"

"You would n't wish me to rob Leonora of the first telling of her news," he objected.

"No," she admitted slowly; "but I can't imagine why she's in such a hurry. I wonder

if she is to stay at the hospital longer than she expected — that is n't it, is it?"

Dr. Dudley shook his head.

"My advice is to make haste with your toilet and run over to the hospital and find out."

"Yes," Polly agreed, "I will." Yet she stood still, her forehead puckered over the possible good things that could have happened to her friend.

Dr. Dudley turned away, and then halted.

"Is n't your mother waiting for you?" he suggested.

"Oh, I forgot!" she cried, and flew back to where Mrs. Dudley sat, brush and comb in hand.

"How my hair grows!" commented Polly, after discussing the news awaiting her, and silently concluding that whatever her mother knew she did not intend to disclose. "It will be a year next week since it was cut. I shall have mermaid tresses before I know it. Is n't it nice that I was hurt? Because if I had n't been I should never have known you and father. Did you expect to marry him when he took you to ride on Elsie's birthday?"

"Of course not!" laughed Mrs. Dudley. "You were a roguish little match-maker!"

"I never thought of that," returned Polly. "I only wanted you to have a good time."

"I had it," her mother smiled, tying a ribbon to hold the bright curls. "There!" with a final pluck at the bow; "now run along and hear Leonora's glad story! I am afraid she will be getting impatient."

As Polly skipped up to the hospital entrance, the door flew open, and Leonora, smiling rapturously, ran to meet her.

"What is it?" entreated Polly. "I can't wait another minute!"

"Seem's if I could n't, too! I thought you'd never come! What do you think, Polly May Dudley! I'm goin' to live with Mrs. Jocelyn! — all the time! — forever! She's adopted me!"

Polly stared, and then let out her astonishment in a big "O-h!" This was, indeed, something unguessable. "Is n't that lovely!" she cried in delight. "I'm so glad! — just as glad as I can be!"

"Of course you are! Everybody is," Leonora responded blissfully.

They went in doors arm in arm, stopping in Dr. Dudley's office, their tongues more than keeping pace with their steps.

"I should n't think your father and mother would want to give you up," observed practical Polly.

"I guess they're glad," Leonora replied. "Prob'ly I would n't go if they were my own; but I don't belong to them."

"You don't?"

"Why, no. My mother died when I was three years old. I can only just remember her. In a little while father married again, and pretty soon he died — he was awful good to me! I cried when they said he was n't goin' to get well. Then my stepmother married Mr. Dinnan. So, you see, I ain't any relation really, and they 're prob'ly glad not to have me to feed any more. And I guess I'm glad — my! But I can't b'lieve it yet! Say, I'm goin' to your school, and Mrs. Jocelyn is comin' to take me out in her carriage this forenoon to buy me some new clothes!"

Polly's radiant face was enough to keep Leonora's tongue lively.

"She's goin' to fix me up a room right next to hers, all white and pink! And she's goin' to get me a beautiful doll house and some new dolls — she says I can pick 'em out myself! And — what do you think! — she said last night she guessed she'd have to get me a pair of ponies and a little carriage just big enough for you and me, and have me learn to drive 'em!"

"O-h! won't you be grand!" beamed Polly.

And then, while Leonora chattered on, came to her a picture of that afternoon — so far away it seemed! — when she had been folded in Mrs. Jocelyn's arms, to be offered these same pleasures, and which she had refused for love of Dr. Dudley, although the thought of calling him father had never then come to her. How glad she was that she had not mentioned this! She had always had an intuitive feeling that the concern was Mrs. Jocelyn's, to be kept as her secret, and she had therefore been silent. Now Leonora need never know that she was "second choice." Her friend's happy confidences recalled Polly's strolling thoughts.

"I don't b'lieve you have any idea how perfectly splendid it makes me feel to think I'm goin' to have that sweet, beautiful Mrs. Jocelyn for my own mother." The last word was little more than a whisper. Leonora's dark eyes were luminous with joy.

"Why, of course I know!" responded Polly. "You feel just as I did that day father told me he was going to marry Miss Lucy, — I mean mother, — and I was to be their little girl. Don't you remember? I'd been for a visit to Mrs. Jocelyn's and brought home those presents, and Mary Pender thought I must have had such a good time because I was so full of fun."

"I guess I could n't ever forget!" cried Leonora. "That lovely rose-bud sash you gave me was the prettiest thing I ever had to wear in all my life! And was that really the day you first knew about it?"

Polly nodded.

"Queer!" Leonora went on. "There we both went to the hospital, you hurted so awful bad nobody s'posed you'd get well, and I so lame that even Dr. Dudley thought I'd never walk straight! And now — my! ain't

it queer? We're adopted by the nicest folks, and I don't limp a mite! Just see how good I can walk!"

She skipped off gleefully, falling into a slow, regular pace across the room.

"That's beautiful!" praised Polly. "And it does n't hurt you now, does it?"

"Not a bit! Oh, it's so splendid that Dr. Dudley cured me! — why, there's David! No, don't go!" as Polly sprang up. "It is n't school time yet."

The girls ran to the door, Leonora clutching her friend's arm, as if resolved not to let her escape.

"Your mother told me you were here," David began.

"She did n't tell you I was goin' to your school, did she?" laughed Leonora.

"No! Honest?"

"Yes, honest!" they chorused mischievously.

"There's something up!" David's head wagged knowingly. "What is it?"

He looked from Leonora to Polly, and back again.

Then the delightful news could not be

kept a minute longer, but bubbled forth from Leonora's lips, until the three were soon in a torrent of merry talk.

David's interest fully satisfied the girls, which is saying much for it; but the clock ticked steadily on, regardless of adoptions, new clothes, and ponies. Happily there was a chance look across the room, which hurried Polly and David away to school and sent Leonora up to the convalescent ward to make ready for her drive with Mrs. Jocelyn.

CHAPTER III

A WHIFF OF SLANDER

WITHIN a few days the little girl, who on the occasion of the ward's anniversary had been afraid to speak to her beautiful benefactor, found herself established in the stately old house on Edgewood Avenue, and calling the same charming lady "mother."

On the morning that Mrs. Jocelyn's man drove her across the city to the private school which Polly and David attended, she was almost too joyfully excited for comfort. To think that one of her most cherished dreams was actually coming true!

Polly introduced her as, "My friend, Leonora Jocelyn," which made the little dark face pink with pleasure, and nearly caught away the remnant of her self-possession.

The girls and boys received her with polite attention or gushing cordiality, and

she was beginning to calm into something like sober happiness when Ilga Barron appeared.

Ilga was short and plumpy, with pincushion legs, and feet that were trained to dancing. The skirt of her dress was as brief as compatible with fashion, and she swung it with a superior air which abashed the meeker of her schoolmates. She greeted the new pupil with a nod and a stare.

"What's your father's business?" was her abrupt inquiry.

"I have n't any father," Leonora answered gently.

"Oh! Where do you live?"

"On Edgewood Avenue."

"Up opposite Edgewood Park?"

"Yes."

"I thought that Mrs. Jocelyn had n't any children," scowled Ilga.

"She has just adopted me," Leonora explained shyly.

"Oh!"

That was all, accompanied by a little toss of the head. Then Ilga whirled away, calling on her favorite mate to follow.

Leonora's face grew distressfully red, and her soft eyes suddenly brimmed.

For an instant Polly stood dazed; but quickly she commanded her scattered wits.

"There's Lilith Brooks! I want you to know her, she is so sweet! Come, Leonora!" She threw her arm around her friend, and drew her away from the embarrassed group.

"You must n't mind Ilga!" she whispered. "Nobody does!"

Yet all that morning the impertinence of Senator Barron's only daughter occupied more of Polly's mind than her lessons, and at recess her indignant thoughts sprang into words. She went straight to where Ilga was entertaining two of her chosen intimates with chocolate creams.

"What did you mean by treating Leonora so rudely?" demanded Polly, threatening sparks in her usually gentle eyes. "She is my friend, and I wish to tell you that you must n't ever act like that to her again!"

Ilga's box of sweets stopped on its polite way to the newcomer.

"Huh!" sneered the owner of it, "if you think you are going to order me round, you're

mistaken! I guess I shan't associate with every tramp that comes along — so there, Polly Dudley!"

"Leonora is n't any more of a tramp than you are!" Polly burst out hotly.

"No, she is n't — 'than *you* are!' " retorted Ilga, with sarcastic emphasis and a disagreeable laugh.

Polly's eye blazed. She clinched her little fists.

"And *you* are too contemptible to — talk with!" she cried scornfully, and whirled away.

But Ilga's instant rejoinder seemed to retard her feet, for she was conscious of walking slowly, missing none of the words that bit into her sensitive heart.

"Oh! I am, am I? Well, *you* are a regular nobody! You put on airs just because Dr. Dudley adopted you; but he is n't anybody! He would n't stay at the hospital for that little bit of a salary if he was. He can't get a place anywhere else — he's a no—body!"

Ilga knew her victim well enough to realize that any taunt flung at the adored father would rebound upon his daughter

with double force, and she winked exultingly to her companions as Polly made no attempt at retort, but went straight to her desk and bent her white, drawn little face over her speller. It would have given her an added delight if she had known that the book was upside down and its print blurred by a mist of tears.

At the close of a session Polly usually waited for David; but this noon she hurried on alone, and he overtook her only after a quick little run.

"This is great, to go off and leave a fellow!" he grumbled pleasantly.

"Oh, excuse me!" she replied. "I forgot."

"Forgot!" he began laughingly, but stopped. Her gravity did not invite humor.

He wondered what had gone wrong, but was wise enough to ask no questions. After an ineffectual attempt at talk, they fell back into silence, separating at the cottage entrance with sober good-byes.

The kitchen door was unlocked, and Polly walked slowly through the house, longing yet dreading to meet her mother. Down the

stairway came the sound of voices. She stopped to listen.

"Oh, dear! — Miss Curtis!" she sighed, and turned towards the little library.

Although since the recovery of Elsie's birthday ring the nurse had been unusually kind and friendly, Polly could not help remembering that she had once believed her to be the cause of its mysterious disappearance, and just now it seemed impossible to meet her with composure. So she curled up forlornly in her father's big chair, hastily grabbing a book as an excuse for being there.

The story was one she had never read, and its interest was proved in that time and troubles were soon forgotten. Thus her mother found her, and thanks to the respite from Ilga's haunting words she was able to respond to the visitor's greeting with something of her usual happy humor.

Dr. Dudley had been unexpectedly called out of town, so the three dined together most unconventionally. The ladies talked over old hospital days, and Polly, greatly to her relief, was left much to herself. But although she rarely joined in the converse, her

thoughts were not allowed to revert to their unpleasant channel, with the result that when she returned to school things had regained a little of their accustomed brightness, and she was ready to smile a greeting to her friends.

But this happier mood vanished with the opening of the door into the school dressing-hall.

A group of girls were removing their wraps, among which was Ilga Barron. Two of them nodded carelessly to Polly, and then went on talking in low tones, with side glances towards the new-comer. Polly hurried off her coat and hat, but before they were on their hook Ilga broke out in a loud whisper, plainly intended to carry across the hall: —

"Dr. Dudley don't know much anyway! He's got a sister that's an idiot — a real idiot! They have to keep her shut up!"

Even Ilga herself, turning to gloat over the effect of her words, was so startled that she led the way quickly upstairs to the school room, leaving Polly standing there alone, her horrified brown eyes staring out of a colorless face.

"What in the world's the matter?" cried Glen Stewart, appearing in the outer doorway, at the head of a string of girls. "Are you sick?"

"No — yes — oh, I don't know!" she stammered, catching her breath piteously.

They clustered around her, distressed and helpless.

"Are you faint? I'll get you a drink!" And Lilith Brooks ran to fetch a glass.

Polly drank the water, grateful for the kindness, although she was aware of neither faintness nor thirst. Presently she went upstairs with her friends, and the long, dragging afternoon session began.

Several times her recitations were halting, once woefully incorrect. The teacher in charge was about to reprove her for inattention; but the wide, sorrowful eyes made an unconscious appeal, and the blunder was suffered to pass unnoticed.

Polly was glad with a dreary kind of gladness when the hour of dismission came, and she hurried away by herself, intent only on a refuge where she should be alone and could think things out. She found the kitchen

door locked and the key in its accustomed hiding-place; so she let herself in, knowing that her mother was not at home. Up in her own room she sat down by the low side window, and looked out on the bare landscape of early December.

Aimlessly she let her eyes wander over the desolate garden of the next house, so recently robbed of all its greenery; then the muslin-draped windows opposite came within her vision. The caroling canary, in his little gilded prison, caught a glance, a frolicking squirrel running an endless race in his make-believe home, a lady stitching on a pink gown, and so towards the street. What she saw there made her start as if with pain.

Up the sidewalk strolled a lad, "Foolish Joe" people called him, and he was, as usual, accompanied by a little band of fun-loving, teasing boys. In a moment they were gone; but the shambling central figure with its vacant face stayed with her to accentuate her distress. She leaned her head upon her arm, but she could not shut out the picture.

Ilga's sneering phrases rang back and forth in her brain, until clear thought was impossible.

"Lucy! Polly! Are you up there?"

She had not heard any one come in, and she started at sound of her father's voice. Instead of answering she shrank back into her chair, involuntarily delaying the moment of meeting.

Dr. Dudley was mounting the stairs, two steps at a time.

"Well!" His tall figure filled the doorway. "Where is your mother?"

"I — don't know," Polly faltered. "She's gone out — the door was locked — maybe with Miss Curtis. Miss Curtis was here to dinner."

"Was she!" And then, "I am going down to Linwood, and I thought you folks would like the ride. We shall have to go alone, shan't we?"

Polly did not look up, — perhaps could not would be nearer the truth; but she rose instantly.

The Doctor took a step forward, and tilted her chin upon his finger.

In spite of her efforts to smile, her lip quivered.

"You and David been having a quarrel?" he asked whimsically.

"Oh, no, we never do!"

"Perhaps you missed a word in spelling?"

She shook her head, with a sober "No."

"Geography, then?"

"Yes, I made a mistake," she admitted.

"I would n't worry over that."

"No, oh, no!"

"Then that is n't it? How long are you going to keep me guessing?"

She hid her face against his coat. "Don't ask me, please!" she begged.

"Is it as bad as that?" His tone would usually have sent her off in an amused chuckle; now she was miserably silent, pressing closer into the friendly folds.

"If it is an all-afternoon affair, we may as well sit down," and, wheeling about, he took the chair she had just left, drawing her to his knee.

"Now let's look at this together, Thistledown. Two heads ought to be wiser than

one, you know. Just give me a chance to show my skill at helping."

"I — can't! It would make you feel bad — awfully bad!"

"Something you did at school? I promise my forgiveness."

"Oh, no! I have n't done anything — only told Ilga Barron what I thought of her. And I'm glad I did!"

"That the pudgy girl we met the other day? — the one that did n't have cloth enough for a decent dress?"

In spite of herself, Polly let go a giggle with her assent. "Why, father," she remonstrated, "she could have her skirts longer if she wanted to! She's Senator Barron's daughter!"

A quiver of laughter stirred the Doctor's face.

"All right, we'll let the Senator's daughter wear her frocks as short as she pleases. But what else has she been doing?"

"She said," began Polly, "that you — oh, I can't!" She caught her breath in a sob.

"About me, was it? I see! You've been carrying a burden intended for me on your

small shoulders, when mine are broad enough to bear a whole pack of abuse! Drop the load at once, Thistledown!"

Despite his tender humor, Polly detected in his voice a note of command, and she strove to obey.

"She said — that you — that you — were a nobody!"

"Is that all?" he laughed. "Well, so I am, measured by her standard, for I am neither a man of wealth nor an influential politician. But, Thistledown, don't you think you are a bit foolish to let that trouble you?"

"There's something else," she replied plaintively.

"I am ready."

"She told some girls — she meant I should hear — that — that your sister is — an idiot!" The sentence ended in a wail.

Dr. Dudley's arms tightened around the slender little figure, and for a moment he did not speak.

When words came they were in a soft, sad voice.

"I have no sister on earth. She went to Heaven two years ago. I will tell you about it.

Until Ruth was six years old she was a bright, beautiful little girl, beloved by everybody. She was eight years younger than I, and my especial pet. Then came the terrible fever, and for days we thought she could not live. Finally she rallied, only for us to discover that we had lost her — her brain was a wreck. The semblance of Ruth stayed with us twelve years longer, until she was eighteen years old; then she went Home. That is undoubtedly the foundation for Ilga's malicious little story; but, you see, Thistledown, there is no present cause for sorrow, only thankfulness that Ruth's journey is safely ended. We can remember her now for the dear child she was."

Polly was crying softly on her father's shoulder. Presently she asked: —

"May I tell Ilga?"

"I would n't bring up the subject. If it should ever be referred to again, you might let her know the truth, as simply as possible; but sometimes things are better left unexplained."

Polly was silent, and Dr. Dudley went on.

"I think it will be well for you to keep out of the way of Miss Barron as much as you can. Should there be an opportunity for any little kindness, do it unobtrusively and sweetly, as I know you would; otherwise give her a wide berth — she needs it."

"I'll try to," Polly agreed. "But, father, don't you really care 'cause she called you that?"

"A nobody?" he smiled. "I should be one if I allowed it to annoy me. My little girl, I wish I could make you see how trivial, how inconsequent such things are. No human being is a 'nobody' who is faithful to the best that is in him. It does n't make much real difference what people say of us, as long as we keep an honest heart and serve God and our fellow travelers according to our highest knowledge. Life is too brief to spend much thought on taunts or slander. We have too much else to do. I suppose it is scarcely possible for a person that does anything worth doing to get through life without sometimes being talked about unpleasantly and misrepresented. Do you know what Shakespeare says about that? 'Be thou as

chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny.'

"But there comes mother! Run, get your hat and coat, and we'll have our ride."

CHAPTER IV

COUSINS

CONTRARY to the physicians' fears, Erastus Bean's condition improved day by day. Polly went often to see him, delighting the little man with her small attentions and her ready sympathy. It was on a Monday morning that he found out the letter had been missing from the rosewood box, and he was at once perturbed over the loss.

"Jane must 'a' put it some'er's else, some'er's else," he complained, over and over, although Polly begged him not to worry.

"It does n't matter so very much if I don't know who those relations are," she assured him, "and anyway we may find the letter sometime."

"Yer don't s'pose the Doctor said anything to Jane about it?" he queried suddenly, his eyes sharp with anxiety.

"Oh, no! I guess not," Polly replied easily.

"Wal, yer won't let him, will yer?" he pleaded. "Cause I'll sure find it soon 's I git home, an' Jane, she's kind o' cranky, yer know! But she's got her good streaks, Jane has! She brought me a bowl o' custard th' other day — that was proper nice o' Jane!" His wrinkled face lighted at remembrance of the unexpected kindness.

Polly smiled in response, while she wondered vaguely if Aunt Jane really loved the little man whom she ordered about with the authority of a mother.

"It's too bad 'bout that letter," Mr. Bean rambled on. "Yer'd ought to find out who them relations be — an' 'fore they have time to die. Folks go off so quick now'days, an' mebbe, if they only knew yer, they'd leave you some o' their prope'ty so 's you could live like a queen — ther' ain't no tellin'."

"I don't b'lieve I'd like to live like a queen," laughed Polly. "But," she admitted, "I should love some own cousins. I would n't wonder if you'd find the letter

when you go home. I feel just as if you would, and — oh, my! I did n't know it was so near nine o'clock!" as a distant *cling-clang* made itself noticed. "That's the last bell! Good-bye!" And Polly whirled off, Mr. Bean gazing the way she went long after her blue plaid had vanished from his sight.

Up the street she ran, fearful of being tardy, and slacking to a walk only when a view of the downtown clock told her that she still had time to spare.

Turning in at the side gate of the house where the school was kept, she saw a lady on the front porch. In the doorway beyond stood Miss Greenleaf, the head teacher, with a girl — a very pretty girl of about her own age. This was all she had time to observe before passing out of sight, on her way to the children's entrance. But a few words, caught just as she slipped by the house corner, stayed with her.

"I am glad, Mrs. Illingworth, that you think" —

"Illingworth!" Polly repeated softly. "I never knew there were any Illingworths in town. Mamma used to say there were n't. I

wonder if she could be related — oh, I wonder!"

Having reached her seat, she began to watch the door for the new scholar. She tried to attend to the opening exercises, but found her eyes constantly reverting to the spot of fascination, until she grew strangely excited. She really had not long to wait. Soon the girl was ushered quietly in and given a seat five desks away. Polly wished it had been nearer. Then she might have been asked to show the new pupil about some lesson, or to lend her a book. But she was at a convenient point for being observed, and that was a distinct advantage.

The girl was a slight little thing, who carried herself gracefully, without bashfulness. Her soft brown hair, brushed smoothly back from the tanned oval face, fell in long, thick braids over the slim shoulders, and disappeared in crisp ribbon bows of the same color. The dress was a simple affair of light blue wool, which fitted the wearer perfectly and gave her the air of being more richly clad than some of the girls whose frocks were of costlier material.

Polly came near giving too much attention to these interesting details, but finally settled down to study in the contented belief that she was "going to like" the girl with the familiar name. At recess she would speak to her, and "get acquainted." For two hours this was her fixed hope. Then, when the rest time came, before she could make good her desire, she had the dissatisfaction of seeing the new scholar walk away arm in arm with Ilga Barron, and she turned back to her desk with sober eyes and regret in her heart.

"Is n't Patricia Illingworth lovely?" whispered a voice.

Polly looked up, to see Betty Thurston.

"Do you know her?" she questioned in surprise.

"Of course not," smiled Betty. "But I'm going to — if that hateful Ilga Barron does n't monopolize her all the time."

"But how did you know what her name is?" persisted Polly.

"Oh!" explained Betty, "I was up at Gladys Osborne's Saturday, spending the day, and Gladys's Aunt Julia was there — she boards at The Trowbridge, you know,

and she told us all about the Illingworths. They board there, too, Patricia and her mother. They aren't stuck up a bit, though I guess they're awfully rich. They came from 'way out West — I forget the name of the place. It's where Patricia's father's got a mine. And she hasn't ever been to school much, only studied with her mother, and rode horseback, and all that. Aunt Julia said she was coming to our school, and I think she's lovely; don't you?"

"Sweet as she can be!" agreed Polly.

"I know why Ilga pounced on her so quick," confided Betty. "I'll bet she heard me telling Lilith and some of the other girls that she was rich, and that's just why. We were down in the dressing-room before school. If it hadn't been for her we could have got acquainted this morning."

"Well, there are more days coming," laughed Polly philosophically. "That's what mother always tells me, when I want to do a thing right then, and can't."

The talk passed to other matters, yet the eyes of both girls followed the new pupil as she and her companion strolled from room to

room of the little suite. Here and there they would pause for a few words with some of Ilga's friends, or to look from a window, and then move on again. The Senator's daughter was assuredly doing the honors for the entire school.

Polly and Betty laid plans for "the next time," but Polly kept her secret hope close hidden in her heart, not disclosing it even to David on the way home.

Neither did she let it be known to father or mother.

"Prob'ly Patricia is n't related to me at all," she argued to herself. "It is silly to think anything about it."

Yet the subject was still present in her thoughts at the beginning of the afternoon session, and she wondered when the opportunity that she longed for would appear. It came soon, and not at all according to her conjectures.

School was dismissed in order of deportment marks, those who stood highest for the day passing out ahead. Among this small number was Polly. When she reached the street door she was dismayed to see that it

was raining, and she stood hesitant on the sill, having neither raincoat, overshoes, nor umbrella. Indifferently she noticed a limousine waiting at the curb, and wondered for whom it had been sent.

"I think you go my way," spoke a clear voice behind her. "May I take you home?"

Polly turned quickly, to look into the gray eyes of Patricia Illingworth.

"Oh, thank you!" was the smiling response. "I did n't know it was raining until just this minute."

Before she had time for more, the other had caught her arm, and she was being escorted to the street under Mrs. Illingworth's green silk umbrella. Then she was seated beside Patricia, and they were gliding along the road. Even in her delighted surprise the thought that all day had been uppermost pushed itself to her lips. But it was Patricia that spoke first.

"I have been wanting to know you ever since I first spied you this morning," she beamed. "I was in the front door when you were going in at the side. I knew we'd be friends right away."

Polly looked her pleasure.

"And I've been longing to get acquainted with you," she confessed. "It was partly on account of your name. That was mamma's name too, — she was Phebe Illingworth."

"Why, is n't that fine!" exclaimed Patricia. "I'm going straight to look in papa's Genealogy, just as soon as I get home, and see if we're related! Would n't it be grand if we are?"

She squeezed Polly rapturously.

Then the car stopped at Dr. Dudley's door.

"My grandfather's name was Rufus Illingworth," added Polly to her thanks. "Oh, I do hope we are cousins!" she smiled. "I've been wishing and wishing for ever so long that I had a cousin, and it will be lovelicious if you should turn out to be one."

With earnest good-byes the new friends separated, and from the shelter of the piazza Polly answered the salute of the little hand at the limousine window as long as she could see it.

There was no holding back this time. The story of the day, or the portion of it occupied

by Patricia Illingworth, was related in detail, both in Mrs. Dudley's room before tea and at the table afterwards, as the Doctor was kept busy at the hospital until six o'clock.

They were through with the meal, and Polly was helping her mother carry the dishes into the kitchen, when the telephone called the physician from the room. In a moment he was back.

"Your new friend is holding the wire for you," he told Polly. And she ran, her heart happy and fearful all at once.

"That you, Polly? Oh, say, we are cousins — third cousins! Is n't that great?"

"Beautiful!" responded Polly.

"We had the longest time finding the book! I was afraid we'd left it in Nevada, and mamma was too; but it was 'way down in the bottom of a trunk. Do say you're glad, and say it good and strong, so I'll know you mean it! I could n't wait till to-morrow! I hope I have n't bothered your father."

Polly's reply seemed fully to satisfy the other end of the line, and, with a good-night and a promise to be early at school the next morning, she hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER V

A MONOPOLIST AND A FANFARON

ON their way to school Polly and David were joined by Patricia; but soon afterwards the lad courteously excused himself, to run across the street to see an acquaintance.

"Nice boy, is n't he?" observed Patricia.

"He's lovely," praised Polly, but she scowled a little, her eyes following David. "I wish he had n't gone off so quick," she added regretfully; "I wanted you to know each other."

"I like him," admired Patricia, "and I like my new cousin," she giggled, squeezing Polly's arm, "I just love her!"

So for the moment David was forgotten, and the boy, viewing them from a little distance behind, saw them enter the school yard in high glee. Laughter was far from his face as he followed. He wished that Patricia Illingworth had stayed in Nevada.

At the foot of the staircase the two girls met Ilga Barron. The Senator's daughter instantly seized upon Patricia with a playful reprimand.

"You ran away from me last night!"

"Yes, I went to carry my cousin home," retorted Patricia roguishly.

"Who, I'd like to know? Nobody in this school!"

"Yes, she's right here!" laughed the other, enjoying Ilga's puzzled stare. "Allow me to present my cousin, Polly Dudley!" She drew Polly forward.

"Huh, not much! You can't make me swallow that!"

"It's true! Is n't it, Polly? We're third cousins! I found it in the Genealogy last night! Her mother was an Illingworth!"

Ilga's face lighted.

"Oh, you're 'way off!" she broke out. "She is n't related to her mother at all. She's only an adopted child."

"But I mean her real mother!" returned Patricia indignantly. "Her own mother was Phebe Illingworth, and was second cousin to my father — as if I did n't know!"

"I don't care!" Ilga retorted. And she ran up the stairs.

Some of the girls, standing by, snickered; but Polly and Patricia gazed soberly at each other. Then they walked over to the rows of hooks, unbuttoning their coats as they went.

"I think Ilga Barron's just horrid!" whispered Patricia. "I did n't like her yesterday, and to-day I hate her!"

"Oh, you must n't!" objected Polly.

"Why not?"

"Because we ought to love everybody, I s'pose," Polly answered slowly.

"Do you love her?" demanded Patricia. "Do you, honest?"

Polly shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't now," she admitted; "but maybe I can some time."

Patricia laughed. "I don't b'lieve I shall — ever," she declared; "you can love her enough for us both."

A flock of girls came in from outside, and confidences were hushed, the two presently going upstairs arm in arm.

"Don't forget that you are to go home with me right after school to-night!" whis-

pered Patricia, just before they reached the upper door.

"I could n't," was the smiling answer. And Polly went to her seat, still thinking of the pleasure ahead.

At noon David lingered behind until the girls were gone, and hurried off in advance of them on the way back, trying to satisfy his conscience with the argument that they would n't want him "tagging on anyway." So the new friends were left for the greater share of the walk quite to themselves, Polly, when not too much interested in tales of the pet broncho back in Silverton, keeping a lookout for David, and wondering where he could possibly be. She even went so far as to wish, away down in her secret heart, that David were going with her on the first visit to her new cousin.

Opening from the principal schoolroom was a deep, narrow closet where the working supplies were kept. To reach the shelves at the back one must pass through the pinched little door, an easy matter for a sprite like Polly, who flitted in and out at any angle; but an occasional plump pupil was obliged

to slip in sideways or be unpleasantly squeezed.

The afternoon was half through when extra paper was needed, and Miss Carpenter, an assistant teacher, asked Ilga Barron to fetch some.

"One of those large packages on the third shelf," she explained, as the girl started.

Strangely enough, Ilga had never been to the closet, and was unprepared for its cramped dimensions. A bit elated with the importance of her errand, she went heedlessly forward, bumping against the mouldings as she entered, and flushing with vexation on hearing a giggle from one of the boys. In her confusion she grabbed two packages instead of one, and attempted to make her exit; but to her dismay she found that with the bulky parcels in her arms the return passage was to be difficult if not impossible. Scarlet with mortification, yet holding blindly to her bundles, she twisted this way and that, while the children, bubbling with suppressed mirth, watched her breathlessly. To add to her discomfiture, several distinguished-looking visitors were approaching

from the next room, whither the teacher had gone to meet them, and Polly, throbbing with sympathy, saw that she was on the verge of tears.

Suddenly, with no thought save of Ilga herself, Polly sprang to her feet, and running lightly over to the prisoner put out her hands for the parcels. But Ilga, misinterpreting the motive, drew back in anger, muttering something about wishing "folks would mind their own business." Polly, however, loyal to her aim, followed into the closet, and in an earnest whisper urged the other to give up the paper, that she might pass out in freedom. Finally, just as Miss Carpenter appeared, to learn the cause of the commotion, Ilga emerged, red-faced and sullen.

"What is all this fuss about? Polly, how came you here without permission?"

"To help Ilga," she faltered.

"I have never known a girl to need assistance in getting a ream of paper," the teacher replied severely, "especially so big a girl as Ilga."

A titter ran through the room, and an uncontrollable smile flickered on Polly's lips.

Nettled by this show of levity, for which she discerned no cause, Miss Carpenter's sentence upon the supposed culprit was instant and merciless.

"Go to your seat, and stay there until six o'clock!"

Hands waved frantically, David's and Patricia's wildly beat the air; but the young teacher either was too much occupied with her visitors or did not choose to notice, and the would-be defenders were soon called to recitation.

Polly sat still in her chair, dazed by the suddenness and injustice of it. She had meant only to spare Ilga further mortification — and had lost her expected treat. She took up her history with a long sigh.

It was a weary afternoon, and not alone to Polly. The children were distraught and restless, and things went wrong. The bell for dismissal struck a note of relief.

Polly had a faint, a very faint hope that Ilga would explain the matter, and she watched her furtively as she passed out; but the Senator's daughter walked straight by the teacher's desk without turning her head,

and as Polly saw her plump figure disappear in the stairway she went back to her examples, philosophically thinking that, at any rate, she could get her lessons for the next day, and so have the evening free to enjoy with mother. If there were a best to any situation, Polly was sure to find it.

But to-night clouds gathered early about the sun, and presently the schoolroom grew dusky. Soon it was too dark to read, and with regret Polly shut her book. She looked at her little watch which she usually wore, the "wedding" gift of Colonel Gresham, and was surprised to find it to be after five. She did not put it directly back in its pocket, but held it in her hand, fingering it lovingly, thinking of David's uncle, and then of the "stormy midnight" and the "sunshiny morning" which the little timepiece commemorated.

So absorbed was she that the opening of the door caused her to start; but she smiled when she recognized through the dimness Miss Cordelia, the younger of the two Townsend sisters who kept the school.

"My dear," exclaimed Miss Cordelia's

soft voice, "I am so sorry this has happened. David Collins has been telling me how it was."

"David?" repeated Polly in a glad tone. "But, Miss Cordelia, I went without permission."

"Yes, dear; but a kind action is its own excuse. You were doubtless thinking only of Ilga."

"That's every single thing I thought of," Polly assured her. "It seemed funny she did n't put the paper out first and then come herself; but I s'pose she was flustered and did n't think. I felt so sorry for her, and the next thing I knew I was racing over there. I did n't mean to break the rule, truly I did n't, Miss Cordelia!"

"I can easily believe you, dear, and I am sure Miss Carpenter was not intentionally unjust. She could not have understood. Somebody said she was not feeling well, and that she went home directly after school. She must have forgotten what she told you; her memory is treacherous at times. Please say to your father and mother, dear, that my sister and I are very much grieved over

the occurrence, and that we shall endeavor to let nothing of the kind ever happen again. We will have that closet door widened; it has made too much trouble already. Run down to David now; he is waiting for you." And with a kiss from the stately little lady Polly was dismissed.

David was found on the walk leading from the pupils' entrance executing a double shuffle, to keep his feet warm, for the air was growing keen.

"Well! you've got here at last!" he cried.

"It's awfully good of you to wait for me," she crooned, skipping into step.

"Pretty queer if I had n't waited! I'd have got you off sooner, only the maid said they had company, and I did n't want to butt in. So I just ran home and to your house, to tell them how it was — while I was waiting for those folks to go. I guess that maid thought I was in a mighty hurry to see Miss Townsend, for I kept running round to the kitchen to know if the coast was clear."

"What a lot of trouble I've made you!" Polly lamented.

"Trouble nothing!" he scouted. "But whatever did you do it for? That girl! — with all the mean things she's said! And away she stalked after school, as disdainful as ever!"

"I know," Polly admitted mournfully. "But I was so sorry for her — it must have been dreadful!"

"Sorry!" David chuckled. "It was too funny!"

Polly laughed, too, reminded of the ridiculous sight. Then she sighed. "I was awfully disappointed," she went on. "For a minute, when Miss Carpenter told me to stay, I thought I just could n't stand it. I did n't dare look at Patricia, for fear I'd cry."

"Don't see what she had to do with it!" growled David.

"Why, I was going home with Patricia right after school. Mrs. Illingworth had invited me to tea."

"M-m!" responded David.

"I want you to know Patricia," Polly continued; "she's such a dear girl."

"Must be!" he retorted sarcastically. "So kind to go off and leave invited com-

pany as she did! She never waited a minute!"

"Well, but, David, what good would it have done? They board, you know, and could n't wait tea for me."

"M-m," remarked David.

"I don't see why you feel so about Patricia," Polly began.

"I have n't any use for a girl broncho-buster!" he broke out.

"David Collins!"

"Well," he replied, in a half-ashamed tone, "she rides bronchos, does n't she? I heard her telling you about being on a broncho that stood right up on his hind feet, and cut up like sixty!"

"Oh, yes, that was a horse she did n't know about till she got on him! But he could n't throw her! She kept her seat! Was n't that splendid!"

"Splendid!" he scorned. "It's just as I said — she's a —"

"She is not!" Polly burst out indignantly. "It just happened that once. She's got a lovely little horse that she rides, and he's as gentle as can be. She is n't — that! I

should n't think you'd say such things about my cousin." Polly's voice was tearful.

"I d'n' know's cousins are any better 'n other folks," he growled.

"Oh, David!" she protested. Then her face suddenly lighted. "You're not afraid I'll think more of her than I do of you, are you? David, is that it?" as he did not answer. "Why, David Collins," she went on, the words tumbling out tempestuously, "how foolish you are! I could n't! You ought to know! There we were at the hospital together for so long, till it seemed just like one family, and Colonel Gresham your uncle, and all! Why, David, I don't see what makes you feel so! You never did about Leonora."

"That's different," he mumbled. "You did n't run off with her, and leave me to tag!"

"Why, I don't! I want you to come, too! Patricia thinks you're so nice — she said so."

"She does n't know me."

"Enough to like you. I thought we could be friends all together." The tone was plaintive.

"Well," he conceded.

"You know I like you, David, and always shall, no matter how many other friends I have. It was lovely of you to wait for me to-night and to go and tell Miss Cordelia about it — I never shall forget that!"

They had reached the home cottage, and were passing up the walk.

"I guess I wanted to be a monopolist," confessed David.

"A what?" cried Polly. David's long words often puzzled her.

He laughed. "Oh, I wanted you all to myself!" he explained. "I'm a pig anyway!"

"No, you're not!" declared Polly.

He turned quickly. "Good-night! I'll be on hand to-morrow morning."

And Polly knew that David had been won over.

True to his promise, he called early for his old chum, and accompanied her and Patricia to school, showing only the merry, winsome side of his nature, and making Polly proud to own him for a friend.

In the hallway the boys laid hold of him, and carried him off upstairs, where a group

of lads, with heads together, whispering and snickering, surrounded one of the desks.

"What are they up to?" queried Patricia, watching them furtively. "Vance Alden is reading something from a piece of paper — hear them laugh!"

"Poetry, probably," guessed Polly. "He's the greatest boy for writing poetry. He wrote his composition, one week, all in rhyme."

At recess the secret was soon made known. A long row of boys, arm in arm, marched across the recitation room, singing this bit of doggerel: —

"Ilga Barron,
The great fan*faron*,
Went into the closet one day;
But she was so stout
She could n't get out,
And there she had to sta — ay!
And there she had to stay!"

Ilga and several other girls, who were drawing on the blackboard, had stopped when the boys formed in line, to see what they were going to do, and as the singing went on they stood as if dazed; but at the

last, fairly realizing the indignity, Ilga sprang forward, crimson with anger.

"I did n't! I did n't!" she cried. "You mean, mean things!"

Instantly the line rounded into a circle, with the girl inside, and the boys, bowing low, began: —

> "Behold your escort home this noon!
> And on the way we 'll sing this tune, —
>
> Ilga Barron,
> The great fan*fa*ron, —"

They got no further, for the prisoner, with a dash and a scream, burst her bars, and fled to the next room, followed by a laughing chorus from her tormentors.

Polly was distressed.

"I should think you'd be ashamed," she declared, "to treat a girl in that way!"

The boys grinned.

"She deserves it!" spoke up Floyd Bascom.

"Yes, look at her last night!" cried Prescott Saunders. "Never said a word, and let you bear all the blame!"

"An' see the way she's been actin' to you all along!" put in Peter Anderson.

"I know," returned Polly sadly; "but it is n't fair to sing that to her."

"Why not? Why do you care?" It was Vance Alden that questioned. The rest were still, awaiting Polly's answer.

"I'm sorry for her. I know how things hurt."

But the boys only laughed, and began again the taunting song. They were resolved to have their fun.

"It is kind of mean, is n't it?" commented Patricia, as she and Polly and Leonora walked back into the schoolroom.

"I wish they would n't," scowled Polly, glancing across to Ilga's desk, where she was in excited conversation with three or four girls.

"What does fanfaron mean?" questioned Leonora.

"I don't know," answered Polly. "Let's find out!"

Patricia was first at the dictionary, and turned quickly to the word.

"It means, 'A bully; a hector; a swag-

gerer; an empty boaster,'" reading from the page.

Polly looked over.

"Fan" — she began, "why, they have n't got it right! It is n't fan*fa*ron at all, the accent is right on the first syllable, and *fan*faron does n't rhyme a bit! Oh, just you wait!" and she walked quietly away.

Patricia and Leonora followed at a little distance.

Polly went straight to the author of the ditty. There was no distress in her face now. Her eyes were twinkling.

"If I could write as good poetry as you do," she dimpled, "and I wanted to use uncommon words, I think I'd make sure that the accent was right, and that they rhymed."

"Wha' do you mean?" he frowned.

Polly laughed, and ran away.

"There's only one uncommon word in it," mused Vance. "I supposed that was — "

"Those girls have been looking in the dictionary," suggested Amos Rand. "I saw them there a minute ago."

"I'll find out!" cried Vance.

Two or three sprang to accompany him.

"You stay here!" he commanded, waving them back.

He returned talking with Polly.

"Have you told Ilga?" he asked.

"Of course not," she answered.

"Will you promise not to?" he entreated.

She smiled into his anxious face.

"I'll never hear the last of that blunder if she gets hold of it," he fretted. "Say, Polly, don't tell — her or anybody!"

Polly was still silent.

"I thought you did n't b'lieve in hurting folks," he pouted.

"I don't," she replied. "But you only laughed when I begged you not to sing that any more."

"And you're going to pay me off," he responded gloomily.

"Yes," Polly smiled, "that's just exactly what I'm going to do!"

The lad's face darkened.

"I shall pay you off," she went on slowly, "by not telling a single person, and I'll get Patricia and Leonora not to tell either."

"Polly Dudley, you're a dandy girl!" His eyes sparkled.

Polly ran off laughing.

"It's all right!" she reported gleefully to Leonora and Patricia. "Nobody'll ever hear that song again! I was sure of it when I saw the word in the dictionary, for Vance Alden is so sensitive about a mistake. It is funny! Ilga — why, she'd never know whether it was good rhyme or metre or anything! But Vance did n't think of that. Now promise, both of you, that you won't ever tell!"

CHAPTER VI

"NOT FOR SALE"

"WILL your father be at home this evening?" Patricia inquired of Polly, as they left school together. The tone was eager.

"Not all the time. He is due at the hospital at seven o'clock, and we never know when he'll be back. Why?"

Patricia wagged her head mysteriously. "Mamma and I were coming over. Mamma wants to see him."

"Oh! is she sick?"

"Not a bit!" laughed Patricia. "She is n't coming for that."

"Well, sometimes he gets back by eight, if there are no new cases; if there are, he has to stay. But you can come and see mother and me, can't you? We'd love to have you!"

"I don't know. Perhaps. Only mamma wants to see your father on some very special business." Patricia giggled.

"You act as if it were funny," observed Polly.

"It will be if it comes to pass — lovely, too! Oh, don't I wish it would!"

"Is it a secret?" asked Polly, her curiosity aroused.

"Yes, a great secret! I promised mamma, fair and square, that I would n't tell you; but I want to awfully!"

"I guess we 'd better not talk about it, then, because you might let it out."

"Oh, you darling!" cried Patricia, squeezing Polly's arm. "I do wish I could tell you right now! Are n't you aching to know?"

"Why, you make me want to," laughed Polly; "but if it is your mother's private business, of course —"

"It is n't!" broke in Patricia, a-giggle. "It's about you — oh, I must n't!" She clapped her hand over her mouth.

"Me?" Polly's eyes grew round with wonder. "But, oh, do stop talking about it! I'm afraid you'll tell more than your mother will like. Let's think of something else — repeat the multiplication table, or — anything!"

Patricia laughed. "I guess you would n't care much about the multiplication table, if you knew!"

"Don't!" begged Polly, and stopped her ears, beginning to tell of a happening in the Latin class. By the time the little cottage was reached they were chatting gayly about school matters.

Mrs. Illingworth and Patricia spent the hour from eight to nine with Polly and her mother; but Dr. Dudley did not return from the hospital, and the mysterious "business" was not mentioned. Polly went to sleep that night wondering what it could be.

The next afternoon when she came from school she found her father and mother in the living-room. There was a note of tenseness in the atmosphere. Polly felt it vaguely as she threw off hat and coat. She went over to her mother with a caress, and Mrs. Dudley drew her down into her lap.

"I had a call from Mrs. Illingworth this afternoon," began the Doctor.

Polly was instantly eager.

"About the business?" she asked.

"Yes."

She gazed at him wistfully, her heart in her eyes.

"Your mother will tell you about it," he said, rising from his chair.

"No, no, Robert!" protested his wife. "Stay and tell her yourself!"

Polly looked from one to the other. Was it something dreadful, this mysterious "business"? They smiled, to be sure, but not at all as if they felt merry.

Dr. Dudley sat down again, and leaned forward, his arms upon his knees.

"Patricia wants you for her sister," he announced.

"That's queer!" Polly puckered her forehead. "I don't see why it is n't enough for me to be a cousin."

"But they would like you to come and live with them, and —"

"Well, I shan't!" she burst out. "The idea! They might know I would n't. Did you s'pose I'd want to?" she queried. "Did you, mother?"

Mrs. Dudley shook her head.

"Let me tell you what Mrs. Illingworth says," the Doctor went on. "She thinks she

can give you greater advantages than I can — of education, society, and travel."

"Travel!" Polly cried scornfully; "I don't want to travel anywhere! Why is n't Miss Townsend's school as good for me as it is for Patricia and David? And I guess society at The Trowbridge is n't any better than it is here!"

The Doctor and his wife laughed. Mrs. Dudley's arms tightened their clasp.

"You have n't heard all," the Doctor resumed. "Mrs. Illingworth offers you a thousand dollars, to use exactly as you choose, if you will come."

The indignant blood rushed to Polly's fair face.

"Do I look as if I were for sale?" she demanded. "Do I?"

Mrs. Dudley drew her down for a kiss and a "Polly, darling!"

"I have n't noticed any price tag," her father responded, twinkling.

"Well," between a sob and a chuckle, "I think I'll tie a card round my neck, and print on it, 'Not for sale.' As if money'd make up for you and mother!" She hid her face

on the snug shoulder. Then she popped up.

"How would the minister like it, if you should go to him and say, 'Here, I want your wife' (I heard you tell mother, the other day, that you thought she was beautiful), 'and I'll give you a thousand dollars if you'll let me have her!' How do you think he'd like that?"

"Not a bit!" laughed the Doctor. "He might knock me down."

"He ought to!" asserted Polly. "And I don't like it any better than he would. Mrs. Jocelyn did n't offer me money, but 't was just the same. I don't want to be bought!" She turned suddenly. "You don't think I ought to go, do you, mother?"

"No, indeed!" The tone was emphatic enough to satisfy Polly. "If you went I think I should have to go, too!"

"When I go, we'll all go!" declared Polly, "and you can tell Mrs. Illingworth that." Which sent the Doctor off smiling.

Polly cuddled down contentedly in her mother's arms.

"I'm sorry for Patricia," she sighed.

Mrs. Dudley knew Polly, and waited.

"I suppose Mrs. Illingworth is very nice," she went on, a moment after; "but she is n't cuddly, like you. I asked Patricia once if she did n't sit in her mother's lap, and she said no, she was too big a girl. She is hardly any taller than I am. She did n't say it a bit as if she thought so herself. I guess her mother does n't want her beautiful dresses mussed up — that 's it! I love Patricia, but, oh, I 'm glad I am not going to live with them!"

Mrs. Dudley bent her head, and whispered soft words of caress, grateful that to Polly it was given to weigh the things of life in a true balance.

Patricia mourned with many words over Dr. Dudley's refusal of her mother's offer; but the friendship of the new cousins was not lessened, and they were often at each other's homes.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLIZZARD

ON a gray morning in early February Dr. Dudley started for New York.

"I shall probably be back on the nine o'clock train," he told his wife; "but the paper says there is a big snowstorm on the way, and for fear I may be delayed I have left word for Joe to come and fill up the heater." Joe was a boy that did odd jobs about the house, and was familiar with the heater. "He will probably be here early in the evening," the Doctor went on; "but I can see to it again when I get home."

Polly went to school with the snowflakes flying around her. Patricia overtook her on the way.

"Where's David?" she asked.

"He has a cold, and is n't coming," Polly replied. "He telephoned over just now."

"Oh, that's too bad!" lamented Patricia. "I had set my heart on having you and him

this afternoon. Cousin Lester and Aunt Florence are coming from Nevada. Mamma heard last night. He is your cousin, too, same as I am. You'll like him; Lester's all right! He is just David's age — it is a shame David can't come! Won't your mother let you stay home from school? I'm going to."

"I don't know," said Polly. "Would n't after do?"

"Not enough time," Patricia declared. "I want you and Lester to get well acquainted; he is the nicest boy you ever saw !"

"Except David."

Patricia laughed. "I guess you won't except anybody when you've seen Lester. Well, make your mother let school go for once!"

"I'll ask her," Polly promised.

"Tease!" urged Patricia. "Tease like everything!"

Polly said nothing; but there were twinkles in her brown eyes.

When school was dismissed, the storm was increasing, and Polly rode home beside her cousin in the limousine.

She found the back door unlocked, but the kitchen was empty, and there were seemingly no preparations for dinner. She hastened from room to room, and finally went upstairs.

"What is the matter?" she asked in dismayed tone, for her mother was lying on her bed, white with suffering.

"It came on suddenly — this pain." She put her hand to her forehead, moaning.

Polly stood quite still, distress in her face. She waited until the spasm had passed, and then said gently, "Can't I get you something?"

"No. It is that neuralgia over my eye. I have had it before, but never like this. The medicine does n't seem to take hold. If it is n't better soon, I'll have to try something else."

"I wish father were home. Shan't I call Dr. Rodman?"

"Oh, no! It is growing easier. Run down and eat your dinner; I left it in the oven."

"Have you had yours?"

"All I want."

Polly lingered, irresolute, her anxious eyes on her mother's face.

Mrs. Dudley smiled faintly. "Go, dear. There is nothing you can do for me."

Polly ate a scant meal, and washed the few dishes. Then she thought of Patricia. Softly shutting the door of the living-room, she went to the telephone.

Patricia herself answered.

"I'm awfully sorry," Polly told her, "but I can't come."

"Oh, Polly Dudley!" Patricia broke in, "you said you would!"

"Mother is sick," Polly explained, "and I must n't leave her."

"Can't she stay alone? I should n't think she'd mind. You ask her. Oh, you must come! Mamma'll send for you, and you can stay all night. Your father'll be home then. Say, run and see if your mother won't let you come! I'll hold the wire."

"I can't, Patricia. You don't know how sick mother is. I would n't leave her for anything."

"Oh, botheree! You've just gone and spoiled all my good time!"

Polly heard the receiver slammed on its hook. She sat for a minute wondering if she

could say anything to amend matters, but finally turned away. Patricia's vexation was never lasting.

She listened at the foot of the stairs, and then tiptoed up. Her mother lay as if asleep, and she crept noiselessly into her own room.

Outside the prospect was cheerless. Few people and fewer teams were abroad. Wind and snow were in command, beating the window panes, thrashing the bare trees, whirling round house corners with a shriek and a roar. Polly turned from the cold tumult feeling strangely desolate. She read and wandered about by turns, wondering if ever there were any other afternoon so long. At last a sound from her mother's room sent her thither. Mrs. Dudley was sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Is it worse?" Polly faltered.

A murmured affirmative was the only answer.

"I wish you would go to the medicine closet," her mother said feebly, when the pain had lessened, "and get a little round bottle at the right-hand end of the second shelf."

Polly was off like a sprite, barely waiting for directions.

"Yes, this is the one." Mrs. Dudley drew the cork hesitatingly.

"I thought I could do without it," she sighed, "but the pain is growing worse — I must have something."

She bade Polly crush one of the tablets, and two small pills from another bottle, making a powder of the three.

"Your father would have given me this before now if he had been here," she smiled.

"Why don't you want to take it?" queried Polly.

"I always put off anodynes as long as possible. But I will not take a large dose."

"Will it hurt you?" Polly's face was anxious.

"Oh, no! it will stop the pain. But how is it that you are home from school so early? It is not three o'clock, is it?"

"It is after four. But I did n't go this afternoon. I would n't leave you all alone; besides, it is snowing hard."

"Oh, is it snowing! Well, I'm glad you stayed at home. Poor little girl! you are

having a dreary time." She clasped Polly's hand with gentle pressure.

"I don't mind, if you could only be well." Polly's voice almost broke.

"Don't worry! I'm easier now. Perhaps I can go to sleep."

Cautiously she laid her head on the pillow that Polly had made plump and smooth, and was soon so quiet that the small nurse could not be sure whether she were sleeping or not. The rooms were fast growing shadowy, and Polly felt that the lights would be company, so she lit the gas upstairs and down, turning it low in her mother's room. Then fetching her doll, she took a low rocker, and blue-eyed Phebe and brown-eyed Polly sat down to watch.

There was a stir on the bed. Phebe's eyes were wide open, but she made no sign when the sick woman rose totteringly to her feet. Polly's eyes were shut tight, and her breathing soft and slow. She was dreaming of Colonel Gresham and his beautiful Lone Star, when she awoke with a start to find the bed empty and uncertain footsteps in the hall. Leaping to her feet, and dropping

Phebe with no ceremony, she bounded to the head of the stairs, where her mother wavered on the top step. Catching her gently, in a voice not quite steady, she asked: —

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, I thought I'd go down — and help you wash the dishes!" Mrs. Dudley replied. "Poor child! you've had all the work to do."

"The dishes are all washed," Polly assured her, "and I am not tired. Had n't you better lie down again before the pain comes on?"

The sick woman suffered herself to be led back to the bed, where she sat for a moment in silence.

"I'll wipe the dishes for you," she murmured, and began fumbling in her lap. "Where are they?" she asked bewilderedly. "They are not here."

"I put them up in the china closet," Polly answered. "Please lie down! I will call you if I need your help."

At last she was on her pillow, and for a time lay quiet.

Polly lingered near, affright in her heart.

Oh, if her father were only there! For a long time she dared not move, but stood and watched the quiet face. Then, suddenly, the lips began to mutter unintelligible things, and Polly's eyes dilated in terror. That September night, when Colonel Gresham was so near to death, came vividly back to her.

"I'm afraid" — she whispered, but did not go on. With one, long, anxious look she stole softly away and downstairs to the telephone. She wished she had called Dr. Rodman sooner.

Her heart was beating painfully as she took the receiver in her hand. No word came to her ear, nothing save a low sputtering of the wire. She waited, and then gently pressed the hook. Still no answer. Again and again, she made the attempt, until, at last, she realized the truth — the wires were useless.

She sat for a moment, trying to decide what to do. Finally with determination on her face she ran over to the stairs, and listened. There was no sound. Still not quite satisfied, she crept up to her mother's room. She found little change, except that the mut-

terings were fainter, and at times the lips were at rest.

"I must go! I must!" Polly whispered to herself. "She acts just as Colonel Gresham did — oh, dear!"

She dreaded to leave the house, fearing that her mother might rouse — and who knew what she would do! Yet at the hospital was Dr. Rodman and help. It would take but a few minutes to go. Thus reassuring herself, she made ready to battle with the storm. It was not long before she opened the front door, but, unprepared for the fury of the wind, she gave a cry as the knob was swept from her grasp. Still she had no thought of turning back, and snapping the night lock, so that she could return without a key, she succeeded in shutting the door behind her.

Outside was tumult. A procession of blasts came roaring down the street. It was biting cold. The snow stung. The muffled lights shone wanly through the night, and laid bare the desolate scene. Polly breathed hard as she staggered across the piazza. The steps were a drifty slope of

white, making descent dangerous; but she plunged on, gained a scant foothold, missed the next, clutched at nothing, and went down, a helpless little heap in the whirling snow.

Starting to scramble up, she dropped back with a cry. Pluckily she tried it again, this time coming to a sitting posture with a gasp of pain. Her ankle had twisted when she fell, and was now throbbing distressfully.

"Oh, I can't go!" she half sobbed. "Dear, dear mother!"

She looked up and down the street, in hope of help; but none was there. The pain in her foot increased, and she realized that she must act quickly. With a prayer in her heart, she crawled back, little by little, up the steps and over to the door, finally, after much effort, reaching the knob and letting herself in. Once assured that the door was fast, she sank into the hall corner, spent with her struggle.

After what seemed a long while Polly crept upstairs. Her mother was still quiet, as if asleep. There were now no mutterings. Polly shivered in her damp clothing and

went over to the radiator. The warmth was grateful, and she dropped to the floor, cuddling beside her iron friend. Soon there were two sleepers in the lonely room.

When she awoke Polly found herself hugging a cold pillow, and she suddenly remembered that Joe was to have come to fill up the heater. Could the fire have gone out? The question brought dismay. If she could only get down cellar!

Her foot and ankle ached unbearably, and she tried to take off her shoe; but it held fast. She pulled and pushed and twisted, gasping with pain; the boot would not stir.

"Colonel Gresham would let Oscar come over and 'tend to the heater, if he only knew," she muttered sadly — and then a hope popped up. She would ring the dinner bell from a side window — perhaps some of them would hear!

It was a painful journey downstairs, but Polly did not flinch. Again and again the little bell sent its loudest appeal out into the stormy night; but the merciless wind stifled its voice before it could reach a kindly ear. There were snow wreaths in the ringer's hair,

and tears in her eyes, when she shut the window.

"I thought they must hear," she said sobbingly. Then, like a careful little housewife, she shook the snow from her dress, and brushed up the slush from the floor.

"I guess I'll go," she whispered. "Mother will freeze if I don't. P'rhaps I can—I've got to anyway!" She caught her breath in pain.

Hobbling over to the kitchen shelf where the runabout lamp was kept, she lighted it, and, supplying herself with matches and a small shovel, she started for the cellar. In baby-fashion she went down, sitting on the top stair and slipping from step to step. The light threw shadows all about, grotesque and startling; but the little figure kept steadily on.

The fire was very low. Polly gazed anxiously at the dull red coals. The damper in the lower door had a bad habit of opening when it was jarred. It was open now.

"Father was in a hurry this morning when he shut this door," she explained to herself, "and I guess he did n't stop to look. That's why it's burned out."

Slowly and painfully she fetched wood and threw it in the heater, opening the draughts wide, and watching to see if it caught. Soon it began to crackle and blaze cheerily, and, despite her loneliness and her suffering, hope leaped in her heart.

"It will be nice and warm when mother wakes up — oh, I'm so glad I came down!"

Yet it was dreary waiting for the moment when it seemed best to put on the coal, and then she lingered still longer before she dared shut off the draught. But at last her labor was complete. The pipes were growing warm, and the heater could safely be left to care for itself.

Going upstairs was difficult and distressing; but the two flights were finally accomplished, and Polly was free to rest. She lay down quietly beside her mother, though not to sleep. Pain that made her almost cry out for relief kept her awake hour after hour. Mrs. Dudley lay very still. But for her soft breathing the little watcher at her side would have thought her dead. Many times Polly lifted herself upon her elbow, leaned over to listen, and dropped back again satisfied, but with

a stifled groan. Every movement now was torture.

The night seemed to have no end. Polly felt as if she had lain there a hundred hours, and yet no sign of day. She wondered if God had forgotten to wake up the world — and then she slept.

It was so that Dr. Dudley found them at eight o'clock in the morning. When Polly came to herself her father and mother were talking of the great storm, the delay of his train, and of her sudden illness. But Polly's story of the night sent the Doctor in haste to the aid of the injured ankle.

One glance at the swollen foot, and he whipped a pair of scissors from his pocket, inserting a blade underneath the leather.

"Oh, father," cried Polly in alarm, "these are my second-best boots!"

But the scissors were doing their merciful though destructive work, and the little sufferer closed her eyes with a sob of relief.

For several days Polly's seat at school was vacant; but Patricia did not allow her to get lonely.

"If you had come to see Lester, as I

wanted you to," she insisted, "you would n't have sprained your ankle and had to stay home. Honestly, don't you wish you had?"

Polly glanced across to her mother with a mysterious smile.

"I am sorry," she answered, "not to have seen your cousin —"

"And yours!" put in Patricia.

"Yes, 'and mine,'" Polly laughed. "But father says that blizzard lessons are sometimes better than Latin and geography; so I'm glad I did n't miss them."

Patricia looked puzzled.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERMEDIATE BIRTHDAY PARTY

"THERE are Leonora and David and Patricia, to start with," began Polly, "and Elsie Meyer and Brida McCarthy and Cornelius O'Shaughnessy."

Mrs. Dudley, writing down the names, smiled her sanction.

"I want to invite as many of the girls at school as I can," Polly went on thoughtfully, "Lilith Brooks and Betty Thurston anyway — oh, and Hilda Breese! I must have Hilda. She is a new scholar, but such a dear! How many does that make?"

"Eight girls, with you, and two boys."

"Only three more girls!" mused Polly anxiously. "I can't leave out Aimée Gentil, and I meant to ask Mabel Camp and Mary Pender." She paused.

"That just makes it." Her mother's pencil was waiting.

"But I don't know what to do," Polly

sighed. "There's Gladys Osborne, I ought to invite her. She's Betty's intimate friend, and I'm afraid she'll feel hurt to be skipped. And Ilga!" She drew another sigh.

"Ilga Barron?"

Polly nodded, her forehead wrinkled over the problem. "She has been good to me lately, and she'll expect an invitation. Still Mabel and Mary don't have half the fun that Ilga has, and I want them. Oh, dear, having parties is hard work!"

Mrs. Dudley smiled sympathetically, but offered no direct assistance.

"Suppose we leave the girls, and take up the boys. Then we can come back, and things may look clearer."

"All right." Polly welcomed a respite from the struggle between loyalty to her old hospital friends and duty to her new acquaintances.

The second list was soon complete, with former patients of the convalescent ward outnumbering the others.

"I want Otto Kriloff and Moses Cohn and those boys to have a good time for once," Polly unnecessarily explained, and

then turned to the matter which had been dropped.

"I think I'll have Aimée and Gladys and Ilga," she at length decided. And so the names went down.

"I will write the invitations this evening," promised Mrs. Dudley; but in less than an hour came Mrs. Jocelyn with a proposal which precluded all previous arrangements and more pleasantly solved Polly's difficult problem.

"Leonora and I are in a quandary," began the little lady who was used to having her own way, "and we hope you will help us out. With Polly's birthday coming on the eighteenth and Leonora's on the twentieth, and we planning for separate parties, it is strange I did n't think of it sooner. Probably it would n't have occurred to me now, only that the invitation list has been giving us no end of bother."

Mrs. Dudley and Polly smiled appreciatively to each other.

"We reached the end of it," Mrs. Jocelyn continued, "long before Leonora was through choosing, and she was distressed at

thought of leaving out so many. It is all nonsense, this restricting the number of guests to the years; but if it must be so I think we had better combine. Then we can double the list, and nobody will have to be invited twice. Polly and Leonora ought to be satisfied with forty-four friends — no, forty-two besides themselves," she amended, with a twinkle in her gray eyes.

The girls eagerly awaited Mrs. Dudley's reply.

"That would be very pleasant," she began; "but —"

"There is n't a single but to it," laughed the little lady comfortably. "We will have the party at my house, two parties in one, on the nineteenth."

"Oh! that will be a between birthday party, won't it?" piped Polly delightedly.

"We will call it just that," agreed Mrs. Jocelyn.

Plans were making progress when the Doctor came in, and Polly watched his face anxiously as he listened. She knew the signs.

"I don't quite like this arrangement," he objected frankly. "We have intended to

make Polly's party a very simple little affair, without fuss or ceremony. You, of course, will wish things different."

"Now, see here, Dr. Robert Dudley," broke in Mrs. Jocelyn, laughingly, "I'm not going to allow any such insinuations. It shall be bread and butter and cookies for tea, if you wish; but you are not going to spoil our good time. Just look at those children! They are worrying their hearts out for fear you won't let them play hostess together."

At that, the disturbed faces broadened into smiles, and presently the Doctor asked Polly if she had shown Leonora the new paper dolls that Burton Leonard's mother had sent her. Which delicate hint told her that the elder people preferred to discuss the matter alone.

It was finally settled according to Mrs. Jocelyn's mind, as Leonora had felt sure it would be.

"Mother always makes things go her way," she declared, "and it is a beautiful way, too!"

When it came to deciding on the guests, all was harmonious, even when Polly sub-

mitted the name of Ilga Barron, to whom Leonora had felt a strong dislike since her first day at school.

"But you can have her if you want her," she conceded. "I only hope she won't spoil the party."

Polly had the same secret hope, mingled with not a little fear; but she kept silent regarding it, only saying: —

"She has been pleasant lately, and I don't want to snub her just as she's growing good."

On the afternoon of Polly's birthday, the school furnace needed immediate repair, and the session came to an early close. It had been arranged for Polly to ride home with Leonora; but as the carriage was not there they took a trolley car, Leonora not being yet quite strong enough for so long a walk.

Polly was the first to spy it, the fairy-like automobile, all white and gold, in front of Mrs. Jocelyn's house. The girls, excited with wonder, walked slowly past the beautiful little car.

"It must belong to somebody's fairy godmother," laughed Leonora.

"Or to Titania," added Polly. "It is pretty enough to be hers."

"Whose do you really s'pose it is?" queried Leonora, loitering at the side entrance for another look.

But Polly had not even a suggestion beyond the fairy queen.

"Let's hurry up and find out!" she cried. And they raced round to the back door.

Barbara, one of the maids, showed plain dismay when she saw them.

"Stay here, here in this room!" she commanded excitedly.

"I want to see mother," objected Leonora.

"No, no!" replied Barbara, with unheard-of severity. "She got vis'tors."

"Did they come in that lovely car? Oh, do tell us that!" Leonora wheedled.

Barbara hesitated, looking from one to the other.

"Please!" coaxed Polly.

"Yes," she finally admitted, "they come in it. But I not tell more." She shut her lips tightly.

Tilly, the cook, slipped outside, and after

a while returned with the word that the girls could go where they chose. They were quick to use the permission; but, as Polly surmised, the little car was gone.

Mrs. Jocelyn only smiled unsatisfactory answers to their eager questions, and they wondered much what it all could mean.

Soon after tea Polly was sent home in the coach, with a box of eleven long-stemmed superb pink roses, a birthday present from Leonora. She ran into the living-room to show them to her father and mother, but stopped just inside the threshold, staring at the corner where a low bookcase had stood. There, shining with newness, she saw a handsome upright piano.

"Why, father," she cried, "what made you do it? You said you could n't afford one just yet, and I could have waited as well as not!"

Dr. Dudley smiled down into her eager face.

"I did n't," he answered. "We were as much surprised as you are. Read that!" pointing to a card tilted against the music rack.

She snatched the bit of white.

To Polly, with all the love and happy birthday wishes that can be packed into a piano.

From her friend,
JULIET P. JOCELYN.

Polly drew a long breath of joy.

"Is n't it lovely!" she beamed.

The next minute her fingers were racing over the keys in a musical little waltz.

Early the next morning came David with a "Little Colonel" book for Polly.

"I did n't know whether to bring it over yesterday or not," he laughed; "but I finally thought I'd better wait for the intermediate day."

"It would n't make any difference," returned Polly, fingering the book admiringly. "Thank you ever and ever so much! I've wanted to know more about the 'Little Colonel.' But what kind of a day did you call it?"

"Intermediate," he replied. "Is n't that right?"

"Of course," she assured him promptly, always secretly marveling at David's ability

to use words with which she was unfamiliar. "It sounds beautiful."

"It means halfway between, I think," he explained; "so I thought it was an appropriate word."

"It is," declared Polly, "a great deal better than just between. It makes it seem more important."

David laughed, and then, spying the piano, admired Polly's new instrument to her full satisfaction, and ended by sitting down and singing a little song which she called "another birthday present."

Shortly before two o'clock the birthday guests began to arrive at Mrs. Jocelyn's beautiful home. The two mothers, one in white and the other in gray, and the two girls, dressed exactly alike in soft white wool, with pink sashes and ribbons, received informally in the east drawing-room, and when the girls and boys were all there Mrs. Dudley started a game.

They were in the midst of the fun, when Polly, glancing at Ilga Barron, was troubled to see an ugly scowl. The children were in a circle, alternate girls and boys, secretly pass-

ing a ring from hand to hand, and it chanced that Ilga had a place between Otto Kriloff and Cornelius O'Shaughnessy.

"Oh, if she makes a fuss!" thought Polly, and straightway the charm of the game vanished.

Ilga's face grew black and ominous. Suddenly, with a scornful "I guess I won't play any more!" she dropped the hands she held, and, with head high, walked mincingly over to the window, and stood with her back to the others.

"What's the matter?" broke from several mouths and showed in every face — every face but Polly's. Polly knew, or thought she knew.

"We'll keep right on," she said in a soft, tense voice; and the play proceeded, yet not as before.

Wondering glances were continually cast towards the window, where the yellow-clad figure stood dark against the light. The Senator's daughter received more attention than the ring.

Meantime Ilga grew tired of waiting for the game to end, and, with a furtive look in

the direction of the players, she sauntered off towards the hallway.

At once Polly excused herself, and followed.

Ilga turned quickly.

"I'm going home," she said.

"Oh, please don't!" cried Polly, adding faintly, "Are you ill?"

"No; but I guess I'd better go. There's such a rabble here."

"Why, Ilga!" gasped Polly.

"Well, 't is!" she retorted. "If mamma 'd known it, she would n't have let me come; she's very particular who I play with."

"They're just as nice as they can be," protested Polly in a soft, grieved voice.

"Perhaps they seem so to you. I s'pose that's the kind they have at hospitals. The little Pole over there, he squeezed my fingers so they 'most ache yet, and that tall Irish kid with the red hair is the worst of the bunch!"

"Oh, Ilga, he's a splendid boy, and so brave! I'm sure Otto did n't mean to hurt you; he is kind as can be."

"It's all right, if you want them; but I

guess I'll go home. I thought there'd be something besides just games."

She turned towards the staircase, yet lingered.

"I'm sorry you don't like it," Polly replied simply. "I'll play anything you wish."

"No, I'm going."

She tossed her head, and took a step upward.

Polly was in terror lest somebody should overhear, for Ilga's voice was sharp with excitement.

"I'll stay and play with the school boys and girls," the dissatisfied guest yielded.

"But I can't separate them," Polly protested in dismay.

"Then I'll go home," Ilga decided, and went slowly up the stairs.

Polly followed sadly, but presently returned, having given over to her mother the care of the Senator's daughter.

Leonora ran to meet her. "What is the matter?" she whispered.

"I know!" spoke up Cornelius. "She don't like the crowd. I had to hear what she

said about me. Say, Polly, I'll get out, if that'll make her stay."

"You shan't!" Polly's eyes flashed. Then they brimmed with tears. "I want you, Cornelius — I want you all! I would n't have you go for anything! Come, let's play — what shall we play? You choose, Cornelius!"

The game was moving pleasantly along when the Barron coach stopped at the door. For a few minutes the interest of the players flagged; then, having seen Ilga whirled out of sight, a festive spirit fell upon all, and the play went on more merrily than before.

Game followed game, and mirth was high, when Elsie Meyer, out for a forfeit, suddenly cried: —

"Oh, me! oh, my! the fairies have come!"

This was enough to halt the others, and the glimpse of a white-and-gold automobile drew the little crowd to the front windows.

Wonder and delight were on the children's faces, as they watched the motorists alight. The dapper man and the slight little woman were given small attention, for in the car

THEN I'LL GO HOME, ILGA DECIDED

were two of the tiniest, dearest midgets that anybody had ever seen. As soon as it was known that they were actually coming into the house, the excitement was great.

"Do you s'pose they're real fairies?" questioned Brida McCarthy eagerly.

Nobody could answer. In fact, just at the moment, words were scarce. Interest was centred on the visitors that were coming up the front steps. The glimpses of the beautiful little creatures as they passed the curtained doorway increased the children's curiosity, and, during the brief time devoted to the removal of wraps, tongues ran lively. The wild surmises came to a sudden halt when the tiny boy and girl appeared bowing and curtsying, being presented to the company as "Their Royal Highnesses, Prince Lucio and Princess Chiara."

The brother and sister at once proceeded to give a unique performance in song, dance, and pantomime, until the young guests were beside themselves with delight.

After this entertainment came the wonderful party tea, arranged and served in Mrs. Jocelyn's happiest style, with eleven little

candle-girls atop of the birthday cake, and ice cream in the form of fairies.

When everybody was stuffed with good things, the dainty Prince and Princess remained for an hour to play with the other children, "just like real folks," as Elsie Meyer declared.

The last game of hide-and-seek came to a merry end, with the finding of the roguish little Princess, who was only eighteen inches tall, curled up snugly back of a small flower pot, inside of a jardiniere. Then the girls and boys bade good-bye to their royal companions, and the guests were all sent home in the beautiful Jocelyn carriage. The stately grays had to make a good many trips before the Intermediate Birthday Party was really over; but the last load was finally driven away, jubilant voices sounding back through the dusk after the children had passed from sight.

"It was just lovely, from beginning to end," breathed Leonora.

Ilga Barron was quite forgotten.

CHAPTER IX

THE EIGHTH ROSE

ON the morning after the party Polly was early downstairs.

Breakfast not being quite ready, she filled up the time by giving fresh water to her birthday roses.

"You are going to the hospital to-day," she told them, as she clipped the ends of the stems and broke off two or three great thorns. "That is, most of you," she amended. "Let me see, you, and you, and you," she decided, laying aside three big beauties. Their number was doubled, and then she hesitated.

"Mother, you would n't keep more than three, would you?"

Mrs. Dudley looked up from the grapefruit she was cutting.

"That is a good number to look at," she smiled.

"So I think," Polly agreed; "but they can

have only one apiece over at the hospital. One alone is pretty, though," she mused. "I'd leave only one for us, but if Leonora should come, she might be afraid I did n't care for them. No, I think eight will have to do, and it will be better to give to those that have to lie abed, won't it?"

Only waiting for her mother's approval, she went on: —

"There's Reva and Ottoine and Mary up in the children's ward, and old Mrs. Zieminski, and that funny little Magdalene, and Gustav and Miss Butler — that makes seven," counting them slowly on her fingers. "I don't know who I will give the eighth to — there are plenty of folks, only I'm not acquainted with them. Never mind, anybody 'll be glad of one of these lovelicious roses, and I'll see when I get there."

"How does it feel to be eleven?" broke in the Doctor's happy voice.

"Why, I was eleven day before yesterday," laughed Polly. "I've had time to get used to it."

"But that was a birthday, and yesterday was a party day; it is when you get back to

the everydayness that you begin to feel things."

"It is n't a bit different from ten," she declared. "Yes, a little, because I have all these roses to give away. Are n't they sweet?" She held them up for her father to sniff.

"Come to breakfast!" was the gentle command from the dining-room, and Polly skipped on ahead, cautioning the Doctor to be sure not to spill the water from the vase with which she had entrusted him.

The hour before school found Polly and the pink roses on their way to the big white house. Having the freedom of the hospital almost as much as Dr. Dudley himself, she flitted in and out whenever she chose, never in anybody's way, and greeted with smiles from nurses and patients.

Her errand this morning carried her first to the children's convalescent ward, where she was so eagerly seized upon that she escaped only by pleading her additional flowers to distribute, and school time not far away.

With the eighth rose still in her hand, and debating whether to carry it up to the child-

ren, or to give it to a boy in the surgical ward with whom she had once spoken, she passed a half-open door on one of the private-room corridors.

Glancing inside, she saw a young man, with bandaged eyes, lying on a couch. He was quite alone, and his mouth looked sad.

"I wonder if he would like it," she questioned, and a breath of fragrance from the half-blown rose answered her. "He can smell it, even if he can't see it," she thought, and stepped inside the room.

The man turned his head.

"Would you like one of my birthday roses?" she asked. "It is very sweet." She put it in his hand.

"I thank you, indeed." The sad lips smiled. "This is quite outside of my programme. In fact, I had almost forgotten there were such pleasant times as birthdays."

"It was day before yesterday," she ventured.

"And I judge by your voice that the number of roses needed was not large."

She laughed softly. "Only eleven."

"About as I guessed! I hope the rest of the birthday matched the roses. This is very beautiful." His fingers gave it a caressing touch.

"Oh, I had a lovelicious birthday! I really had two of them!"

"Two? That sounds interesting. Can't you sit down here and tell me about it?"

"If I would n't be late to school," she hesitated. "I don't know what time it is."

He pulled a watch from his pocket, and held it up for her view.

"Oh, I've twenty-seven minutes! I can stay a little while."

She took the chair beside him, and recounted the story of the intermediate entertainment, intuitively omitting the part which Ilga played. That it was appreciated by her listener Polly could not doubt.

"You must come and see me again," he invited, as she rose to go. "I think you may do me more good than the Doctor."

"Oh, no!" she objected softly; "I could n't do anything better than father! He cures everybody."

The young man smiled doubtfully.

"May I ask who 'father' is? Not Dr. Dudley?"

"Why, yes, sir. I s'posed you knew. I'm Polly Dudley, Dr. Dudley's little girl."

"Are you! Well, Miss Polly, I am surely glad to have made your acquaintance." He ran hurriedly through his pockets. "I had a card somewhere. Probably it was seized with the rest of my belongings. That seems to be a way they have at hospitals — hide a man's things so he can't get at them! Never mind, I have n't forgotten my name. I am Floyd Westwood of New York."

"That's a lovelicious name," Polly told him frankly.

The corners of his mouth curled up.

"I hope you will not fail to come often," he told her, as she put her little hand in his for good-bye.

"Oh, I'll come!" she promised. "But it's father that will cure you."

"I hope so, but," he added soberly, "it does n't look much like it at present."

Polly's eyes went troubled.

Perhaps the other read her silence, for he said brightly: —

"Now that I know the Doctor's little girl, it may be I shall have more confidence in the Doctor's assurances."

"Oh, if he says you'll get well," she laughed, "you need n't worry a single mite! Father does n't ever lie to people."

"That sounds pleasant and mighty reassuring. I am glad you came in. I was getting blue."

"Perhaps you were 'scared,' like Magdalene," she chuckled. "I do wish you could see her! She is the funniest little German girl! She had appendicitis, and the doctors sent for father. He knew right off she could n't live without an operation, and he told her father and mother, and then he went and talked to her. He did n't tell her she'd die, for she's only six years old; but he said she could n't ever go out to play, or have any more good times, unless they took her to the hospital to cure her. And she looked up at him, just as sober, and said, 'I'm scared! I'm scared!' — not a thing else! They brought her up here in the ambulance, and she never said a word all the way. But when she got downstairs, where there were lots of

doctors and nurses, father happened to go near her, and she looked straight up into his face, and said, 'I'm scared! I'm scared!' Poor little thing! I should think she would have been; but she is so funny."

"Did she come out all right?"

"Oh, yes, of course! — father performed the operation. The next day when he saw her she was looking as happy as could be, and he asked her if she was scared, and she did n't speak, only just shook her head this way, and grinned." Polly's curls waved vigorously. "After a few days she grew worse, and they had a consultation, and three or four doctors were there. Father thought she looked frightened, and he asked her if she was scared, and she bowed her head hard — oh, she is so funny! I just carried her one of my roses, and I 'm sure she liked it, but she did n't say a single word."

"I have a fellow-feeling for that little girl," smiled Mr. Westwood. "I know all right what it is to be 'scared,' and it is n't pleasant."

As Polly's lips parted for a response, her eyes fell upon the watch which the young man was still fingering.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, "I forgot all about school! Good-bye!" And she flashed away.

At dinner she told where she had left her eighth rose.

"I am glad you happened in there," returned the Doctor. "He seems to be a fine young fellow, a chemist, just out of college. He came up from New York to see a friend, and while he was assisting with some chemical work he was temporarily blinded by an explosion. He is coming on all right; but for a few days I have noticed that he has seemed rather gloomy. Go again! You will do him good."

Several times during the next week Polly obeyed her father's injunction, and accepted Mr. Westwood's repeated invitations. With every visit the two became better friends, and Polly waited almost as eagerly as the patient himself for the day when his bandaged eyes should be released. Only in Polly's heart there was not a little regret mingled with her anticipated joy, for that would herald Mr. Westwood's going away. Still she would not let the disturbing thought

detract from her present pleasure, and she ran in and out of the young man's room in a happy, quite-at-home fashion.

She was starting for one of these little visits, when her mother called to her.

"I wish you would go down to Besse and Drayton's, and get me a yard more of this ribbon," she requested; "I find I have n't enough." She held out a bit of blue satin.

"I'll be back with it in a jiffy — a ten-minute jiffy," laughed Polly.

Off she flew, tripping down the street and around the corner so briskly that she nearly ran into a little man who was proceeding at a quick, heedless pace.

"Why, Mr. Bean!" she cried.

"I declare, if 't ain't Polly! little Polly! How do you do, my dear? How do you do?"

As soon as Mr. Bean learned that Polly was on her way down to the department store, he turned about, and walked along by her side, listening delightedly to her happy chatter.

"I 'm proper sorry I hain't found that letter yit," he mourned. "Jane she 's been kind o' upset 'n' cranky lately, or I should 'a' asked her about it before. I guess I shall speak

about it to-night, yis, I guess I shall," he assured Polly and himself.

"Oh, don't hurry to do it right away!" Polly responded understandingly. "I can wait to know about my relatives. If Aunt Jane is n't feeling — quite well, it would n't be a good time."

"No, 't would n't," he agreed in a relieved tone. "But I'll have it for yer soon's I see my way to it. Sometime when Jane 's feelin' real good, I'll broach the subjec', I certain will."

Home with her ribbon and then over to the hospital sped Polly. She found her friend impatiently striding up and down the limited space of his room.

"I'd about given you up," he told her in an aggrieved tone. "I concluded you were tired of coming to be eyes for a poor old blind fellow like me, and so had stayed after school to play."

Polly looked at him keenly. Sometimes she did not quite know whether to take him in fun or in earnest. Now his face was serious; but she felt almost sure there was a twinkle behind that tantalizing bandage.

"You know I could n't be tired of coming to see you," she said simply, "and I never stay to play after school. I went on an errand for mother, and then I met Mr. Bean, and he stopped to apologize for not finding a letter that is — lost, a letter about my May relatives."

"What!" His tone startled Polly. "Are you related to the Mays? how? Tell me!" He was waiting with eager, parted lips.

"Why," she hesitated, vaguely abashed all at once, "I'm Polly May, you know — or was. I guess I have n't told you." Polly never talked of her adoption, instinctively guarding as a precious secret what was naturally well known throughout the city.

"No, you have n't; but won't you tell me now, please?"

"Father and mother adopted me the day they were married," she explained simply. "Papa and mamma were dead, and I did n't belong to Aunt Jane or anybody."

"Polly, who was your father — your own father?" The words tumbled close on the heels of her sentence.

"Chester May," she answered dazedly.

Something was imminent. She knew not what.

"Chester May! And your mother's name? Was it Illingworth? Phebe Illingworth?" The words shot like bullets.

"Why, yes!" gasped Polly. "How did you know?"

"Polly! Polly!" He thrust out his hands — they touched Polly's, which he caught in a strong grip. "My mother was your father's sister, his eldest sister! We are cousins, Polly, own cousins!"

Dr. Dudley came, with the nurse, before the story was ended, and then it had to be begun and told all over again, — the old, old story of a quarrel between the father and the "baby" of his family, of the hasty leaving home of the boy, of the meagre news of his early marriage, and lastly of the years that were empty of tidings. These Polly was able to fill up in part, when the story-teller turned listener, with interest almost as great as Polly's own.

Floyd Westwood begged the physician to allow him one little glimpse of his new-found cousin; but Dr. Dudley was firm, and the

eager eyes were not uncovered. Polly soon slipped away to share her joy with her mother, leaving the Doctor and his patient to talk over present plans and future possibilities.

CHAPTER X

A VISIT FROM ERASTUS BEAN

IT was yet early the next evening, soon after Dr. Dudley had gone for his usual round at the hospital, that Polly answered the doorbell to return with Erastus Bean.

Delight laughed from the little man's weathered face.

"There 't is, my dear! there 't is!" he chuckled, carefully drawing a folded paper from an inner pocket. He put it in Polly's hand with an impressive bow. "I hope it will make yer a millionaire," he wished, "yis, I do!"

Polly thanked him, fingering the letter in a somewhat awed way, but not at all as if she were in a hurry to discover her chances towards millionairedom. Meantime Mrs. Dudley was seating the little man in the easiest chair.

Settling himself comfortably, with a pro-

fusion of acknowledgments, he rubbed his lean hands together with a reminiscent smile.

"I took Jane ridin' in a autymobile this afternoon!" he announced.

"You did?" Polly burst out.

"Sure thing!" he beamed. "Jane she's been a-wishin' an' a-wishin' she could go skylarkin' off like other folks, an' when that autymobile driv' up this afternoon, you'd oughter seen her eyes! It was a stylish one, I tell yer! An' we went bouncin' up an' down like the best of 'em! Jane she says it was full as good's a weddin' trip!"

He was silent a moment, smiling at the remembrance.

"I'm so glad you had such a nice ride," purred Polly.

"It was proper nice," he agreed. "Yer see," falling into a confidential tone, "I could n't make out no surer way to git hold o' that letter. Jane she's kind o' cranky sometimes, but she's got her good streaks, and you can coax her into 'most anything. Now when we was whirlin' along there through Cat-hole Pass, on that slick road, I just broached the subjec'. Could n't 'a'

picked out a better minute nohow! She chimed right in, and said 't was time yer had it, if yer was ever goin' to — an' there it is!" He chuckled like a boy over his bit of stratagem.

"Had n't yer better look at it, my dear," he proposed, "just to make certain it's all right?" Eager that his service should bring her joy, he was anxious to see its consummation.

Polly, still dimpling with amusement over Mr. Bean's management of Aunt Jane, unfolded the sheet. One glance at the closely-written first page, the smiles vanished, her cheeks went white, and, drooping her head, she wailed out: —

"Mamma! mamma! Oh, mamma, I want you!"

Mrs. Dudley sprang to comfort her, but the little man was there first. Gathering Polly tenderly in his arms, he crooned over her like a mother.

"There! there! my dear! There, dearie! I know! I know! It's hard! I felt just that way when Susie went. There! cry right on my shoulder — it'll do you good. There,

dearie! Pretty soon I'll tell you something. There! there!"

The tones were soft and soothing. Mrs. Dudley could barely make out the words. Soon the sobbing ceased.

"I did n't know the letter was from her," Polly broke out plaintively. "That's what she used to call me — 'Polly Precious' — oh, de-e-ar!"

"There! there! I know! I know! It's hard, awful hard! I know!"

She lay back on his shoulder again, and presently was more calm.

"Now I'm goin' to tell you something," the little man resumed. "After Susie went, I just could n't stand it without her — she was all I had. Her mother'd gone two years before. An' I got to thinkin' 'bout Susie, an' how she'd always tag me round, from cellar to attic, goin' with me fur 's I'd let her when I went to work, and runnin' to meet me when I come home. And thinks I, 'S'pose Susie's goin' to stay up in Heaven away from me? No, sir! She's taggin' me round just the same as ever! I can't see her, but she's right here!' An' she has been! I could n't 'a'

stood it no other way! An' Susie could n't! The good God knows how much we c'n stand, and he eases things up for us.

"Now, my dear, it's just so with your mother. She loves you more — yis, more — than you do her, an' do you think she stays away from you? Why, no, dearie, she's right here, takin' care o' you all the time!"

"Oh! do you really s'pose that?" cried Polly joyously.

"My dear, my dear!" the little man's voice was tense with feeling, "I don't s'pose — I *know!* Ther' 's nothin' in all God's universe so strong as love, and so what is there to keep love away from us? For, of course, our folks don't stop lovin' us. They're just the same, here or there.

"I don't very often tell people how I feel, for once I got caught. A woman thought sure I was a spiritu'list, and wanted to bring me a message from Susie. But I told her, 'Now, Susie and I git on all right together without talkin', and if she's got anything to say to me that I can understand she'll say it right to me, and not to somebody she 's never seen or heard of. No, ma'am,' I says,

'I know Susie better 'n you do!' So since then I've kep' pretty whist about Susie; but she's a mighty comfort to me every day o' my life."

Polly sat quite still in the little man's arms, her head leaning confidingly against the shiny, well-brushed coat. Her eyes were lustrous with the new, beautiful thought. Could it be really true? She was going to believe so! Presently she was smiling again, and she read that portion of her letter which gave the addresses of her father's relatives. She told Mr. Bean all about the wonderful discovery of Floyd Westwood through a birthday rose, and found that an address in the letter was identical with one which her cousin had given her. She began to feel the pleasant reality of kinsfolk, and when the little man went home she waved him a happy good-night from the piazza, quite as if there were no such things as tears.

CHAPTER XI

UNCLE MAURICE AT LADY GAY COTTAGE

"YOU can't live in Lady Gay Cottage much longer!"

This exulting announcement greeted Polly as she entered the schoolroom.

She looked at Ilga Barron with puzzled eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Just what I say," answered Ilga. "She can't; can she, Gustave?"

The boy at her side Polly had never spoken with, but now she turned to him inquiringly. He had been in school only two days, having but recently returned with his parents from a long stay abroad.

"She's right," he asserted, addressing himself to Polly. "Father's going to sell the place."

"Oh! is that what you call our house?" queried Polly, beginning to understand. "Does your father own it?"

Gustave nodded. "Mother named it from the Lady Gay roses on the piazzas," he explained. "Wait till June, and you'll see!"

"I remember them last summer," Polly smiled. "They were lovely — all pink and white, but I did n't know their name."

"You'll have to go back to the hospital to live, shan't you?" questioned Ilga curiously.

"I don't know," Polly answered. Her face held a bit of anxiety as she moved away.

This piece of news was the foremost topic at the Dudley dinner-table. Polly saw that her father and mother were disturbed by it. Although the Doctor made little jests, the laughter sometimes seemed forced, and occasionally talk would flag. There was no other rented house in the neighborhood, and Dr. Dudley must live in the immediate vicinity of the hospital to retain his position there. This Polly gathered from what passed between her father and mother, and she returned to school in no mood for study or play. Later a thought came which she felt sure would solve the problem. It was not until after tea that she made the proposition.

"Father," she began, atilt on the arm of his chair, "should you like to buy this house yourself?"

"Possibly, if I had plenty of money; but what little I have is tied up where I can't get at it conveniently."

"Oh, then you can buy it right away!" Polly cried gleefully. "You can take my two thousand dollars! Won't that be enough?"

Dr. Dudley's lips set themselves firmly, and he shook his head.

"No, Thistledown, I cannot touch your money. Don't you remember, I told you it must stay where it is until you are of age?"

"Oh, but this is different!" she urged. "Please take it — do!"

Her entreaties, however, could not prevail against the Doctor's judgment.

"What shall we do, then?" she complained.

"Keep still for the present," he laughed. "The house is n't sold yet, perhaps won't be. Don't worry over it, Thistledown! There will be some way out, and a good way, too. Your Cousin Floyd told me to-night that the Royal is due to-morrow.

You know that is the steamer his father sailed on, so you may expect to see your uncle by Friday. Floyd thinks he will come up at once."

"I shall like him if he is as nice as Floyd," returned Polly thoughtfully.

Dr. Dudley said nothing. He was weighing love and legal rights against wealth and near kinship. The balance did not appear to be in his favor.

On Thursday Polly was thrown into a pleasant excitement by the telephone message that came to Dr. Dudley. Uncle Maurice Westwood was in New York, and would motor up to Fair Harbor the next morning, to see his son and his new niece.

"I shall have to stay home from school, shan't I?" Polly questioned eagerly.

"I think not," was the quiet answer. "It is uncertain what time he will come, so things had better go on as usual."

"But what if he should go back before I got home?" worried Polly.

Mrs. Dudley laughed. "No danger of that! Don't you think your uncle will be as anxious to see you as you are to see him?"

"Maybe," she replied doubtfully.

She felt that so unusual an occasion called for her best dress and a stately waiting for the visitor, instead of going to school in her common frock just as on ordinary days when nothing happened. But she made no further objection, joining David on the front walk, and telling him that "Uncle Maurice" was actually coming.

Returning at noon, Polly ran nearly all the way, so eager was she to see if her uncle's car were in front of the house. To her disappointment the only vehicle in sight was a grocer's team at Colonel Gresham's side gate.

"I'm afraid he's gone," she lamented under her breath; yet she hurried round to the kitchen door, and was relieved of her fear by hearing voices in the living-room, her mother's and a deeper one that she did not know.

Uncle Maurice looked a little as Polly had pictured, patterning him by his young son; but she had not made sufficient allowance for years, and he was older and very much bigger than she had imagined he would be.

His smile was pleasant, like Floyd's, and his greeting cordial and even fatherly. When Dr. Dudley came in he found her chatting familiarly upon her uncle's knee.

It was not until after dinner that Mr. Westwood spoke of Polly's future. Then his first sentence almost caught away her breath.

"Well, Doctor, I suppose you are going to give this little girl to me."

"It will be as Polly says," replied the physician, with a grave smile.

He did not look at Polly, who sat in a low chair near by; but she turned to him with an exclamation on her lips. It was arrested, however, by her uncle's response.

"It surely seems to be the only way to fix matters. To begin with, she is my brother-in-law's daughter, and it does n't seem fair to have her out of the family. If my wife were living she would never hear to such a thing, and Floyd wishes her to come to us as much as I do. She will have a mother in my sister, who has kept house for me the last three years, and I can give her every advantage that a girl should have. Of course, she can

visit you occasionally, and we shall always be glad to see you in our New York home or in California. I bought a place down on the Pacific Coast, some six years ago, and I have kept adding to it until I have quite a ranch. It gives us an ideal home for the coldest weather, though this last winter we made only a flying trip there. Business called me across the water, and Floyd would rather dabble in chemicals, and incidentally put his eyes out, than do anything worth while. He does n't take to manufacturing. Wish he did! My two younger boys, Harold and Julian, I put in a military school last fall, and they 're having a dandy time. They will be home soon for their spring vacation, and then Polly can make their acquaintance. They are fine little fellows. Julian is captain of the junior football team, but Harold does n't go in for athletics. You 'll find him curled up with a book at almost any hour. Let 's see — he must be about your age. How old did you tell me you are?"

Polly, thus addressed, murmured, "Eleven"; but only her lips moved. It was as if an automaton spoke.

Mrs. Dudley, glancing that way, was startled.

The soft brown eyes were wide and brilliant, and a scarlet spot on either cheek lighted the pallid face. Polly was gazing at her uncle as if held by some strange power.

"He is only ten," Mr. Westwood was saying. "Julian is fourteen. But there is n't difference enough to matter. You three will get on admirably together.

"Better let her go back with me," he went on, turning to the Doctor. "Mrs. Calhoun, my sister, will fix her out in the way of clothes. You can buy anything in New York, from a shoestring to —"

Nobody heard the end of that sentence, for, with a leap, Polly had the floor. Her eyes flashed, and her voice was tense with anger and determination.

"Uncle Maurice," she cried, "I s'pose you mean all right; but I guess my mother knows how to get my clothes just as well as anybody, and you need n't think I'm going to New York, you need n't think so a single second! Why, I would n't leave father and

mother for a million dollars! I would n't go for ten million dollars!"

"Well, Miss Highflier!" Mr. Westwood threw back his head in a chuckling laugh. "Some spirit in that little frame of yours! Should n't wonder if you took after your father. Chester was a fiery boy. Now, come here, and let me tell you something."

Polly's head went up defiantly. "I'm not going!" she insisted. "You need n't think you can coax me into it! You can't!"

"Polly!" The Doctor's voice was gently admonitive.

"Excuse me," she apologized. "I did n't mean to be impolite. But I shan't go!" She moved obediently towards her uncle, and he placed her on his knee, where she sat, submissive but alert.

"I want to tell you what a splendid time you'll have with us," he began.

"Other folks have tried to buy me," remarked Polly.

"Have they, indeed! It is a good thing to be marketable," with a whimsical glance towards the Doctor.

"I don't like it," returned Polly.

"Well, you won't have any more such trouble after you come to New York."

Polly was silent, but her lips were set, and her eyes grew ominously dark.

"Now, in the first place, you shall have anything in the world you wish, — dolls, toys, and a playroom to keep them in, and a whole library of story-books. Then parties — whew, you ought to see what parties Julian and Harold have! They'd make you open your eyes with envy!"

"Mrs. Jocelyn gave me a beautiful birthday party," responded Polly with dignity.

"Ah? But it was n't a New York party. You don't know what kind of parties we get up in New York. Why, the flowers for the boys' last affair cost two hundred dollars!"

Polly gazed down at the rug, and followed the intricate lines of the pattern.

"Then you shall have the handsomest pink silk party dress we can find in the city, all fixed up with white lace — real lace, mind you! What do you think of that?"

"I don't want a pink silk party dress!" scorned Polly. "I have one already."

"Ah?" Mr. Westwood looked a bit disconcerted.

"I will buy you a Shetland pony," he resumed, "the very best one we can find, and you shall take riding-lessons with the boys. I'll see that you have the choosing of your riding-suit, any color and style you like."

Polly's eyes showed mild interest, and her uncle proceeded.

"I saw a pony awhile ago that I think I can get for you. He is high-priced, but I guess he's worth it. Such a pretty creature! He ate bread and butter and sugar out of my hand."

"That's what Lone Star does!" brightened Polly. "Lone Star is Colonel Gresham's beautiful trotter."

"I think I've heard of him," observed Mr. Westwood.

"Have you?" Polly cried. "Oh, I wish you could see him! He is the most lovelicious horse!"

Her uncle laughed. "Well, you can have one just as 'lovelicious' as he is, a second Lone Star, if you like. Oh, how you will love your pony!"

"I am not going to have any pony!" was the resolute announcement.

"Oh, yes, you are!" he wheedled. "And we'll take him with us when we go to our summer home up the Hudson River. Such a fine time you and the boys will have cantering over the country roads!"

For an instant Polly's eyes sparkled over the picture. Then she came back.

"Uncle Maurice," she declared, "there is n't a bit of use in your trying to make me want to go and live with you! I would n't leave father and mother for a hundred thousand ponies and parties and pink dresses and everything!" She slid from her uncle's arm, and ran over to the Doctor, where she hid her face on his shoulder, breaking into soft sobs.

Mrs. Dudley drew her gently away and upstairs. She ended her cry on her mother's breast.

When she was called down to bid her uncle good-bye, no mention was made of the subject which had brought the tears, and she thanked him very sweetly for his invitation to visit them sometime in the near future.

Yet she watched him drive away in his handsome motor-car with a feeling of relief, and her wave of farewell was accompanied by a radiant smile.

CHAPTER XII

LITTLE CHRIS

POLLY dreaded the next meeting with her Cousin Floyd, for she anticipated his disappointment at her decision. But he took the news cheerfully.

"Just wait till we get you down to our house!" he laughed. "We'll give you so good a time you'll forget there ever was a Fair Harbor."

Polly smiled contentedly. This was so much pleasanter than her uncle's insistence.

Yet when his eyes were free to look upon her, his gayety vanished.

"So like my mother!" he murmured. "Not the eyes, — hers were blue, — but the mouth and the expression of the face — yes, and the forehead! — they are mother's right over again!" His lips drooped sorrowfully. "You bring her back to me better than a picture. It is a shame," he regretted, "when you belong to us, that we can't have you under our roof!"

"I'm sorry," Polly sighed. "I wish I could be in two places."

"One would be quite enough," laughed Floyd, "if only that were New York. Oh, come on, Polly! We'll have no end of a good time."

She shook her head slowly, the red fluttering on her cheeks. "I can't," she told him; "truly I can't!"

"All right," he responded, and touched the subject no more; yet Polly was troubled at the seriousness of his face. Finding relatives was not complete joy after all.

The good-byes, which came soon, brought no further word from him in regard to her decision; but he urged an early visit, to which Polly and her parents agreed.

The taxicab that carried Floyd and his luggage to the station was barely out of sight when Polly spied a familiar little figure on the hospital walk.

"There's Moses Cohn!" she cried. "I wonder what he is coming for."

"Hullo, Polly!" was the friendly call, the freckled face under the shabby hat shining with delight.

She waved him a welcome, dancing about in the cold of the morning until he came up. They went inside together, Moses eagerly unfolding his errand.

"I've been tellin' a kid 'bout Dr. Dudley and you," he began. "He's sick, awful sick, and his father would n't have no doctor, and Chris he keeps a-growin' worser 'n worser. So I said how Dr. Dudley could cure him quicker 'n lightnin', and I guess he'll bring him up — he 'most promised."

"It might be better for me to see him first," observed the physician.

"No, sir! he said 'xpressly for you not to come!"

"Then I can send the ambulance —"

"No, he don't want that neither! He's goin' to bring him right in his arms. Why, I could myself — easy! He's the littlest kid, an' han'some! My, he's a beaut! Jus' wait till you see him! He ain't but nine years old. He goes to my school, or did before he was sick. His father's got the money — you bet! An' my! he thinks that kid's it! He is, too! I guess they'll be here pretty soon — he 'most promised."

On the strength of Moses Cohn's story, Dr. Dudley ordered a bed to be prepared for the probable patient; but he did not arrive until evening and Polly had given up his coming. Then the father insisted on a private room for his little son, remaining himself to see that everything was provided for his comfort.

"Good-bye, Chris! Keep up a big bluff! Daddy'll be here in the morning sure!" That was what the attending nurse overheard of the parting. A minute after the door had shut, she discovered her little patient shedding silent tears for "daddy"; but he brightened quickly at her cheering words, and soon dropped into a quiet sleep.

Polly was anxious to see the boy of whom Moses had told her, but the slow fever from which he was suffering kept him a stranger for many days. When, at last, she was allowed to pay him a visit, even Moses' description of his friend had not prepared her for the beautiful wisp of a lad with the sky-blue eyes and the red-gold hair. Polly thought she had never seen so lovely a face.

Her smile brought a shy response from the pillow, though talk did not at once flourish.

"Father says you are better," Polly ventured.

Only a wee nod answered her.

"I've been wanting to come in before," she persevered. "Moses Cohn told me about you."

A faint smile.

"Do you like it here at the hospital?" Polly questioned adroitly.

No smile now, only an added wistfulness. Then courtesy brought a soft response.

"I like it evenings, when daddy comes."

"It's nice you have him to come to see you. I used to wish I had somebody. There was only Aunt Jane, and I guess she was too busy."

"Were you sick, too?" The sky-blue eyes showed interest.

"I was hurt, and they brought me here. I lived in the hospital ever so long."

"Were n't you lonesome?"

"No, only once in a while, when I saw other folks having company. I was in the ward, you know. After I got acquainted

with father — he was n't my father then — I did n't mind. Don't you just love father? Everybody does!"

"Yes; he's nice," smiled the boy. "How did he come to be your father?"

"He and mother adopted me. My own papa and mamma are in Heaven."

"Oh! are they? That's where mommy is. Daddy is all I've got. I wish you'd come and see daddy sometime. He gets here every night right after six o'clock."

"I'd love to!" Polly beamed. "Fathers are beautiful, I think. Of course, mothers are — but fathers!" Her curls gave the emphasis.

"I know!" cried little Chris, his eyes ashine. "Daddy's the dearest that ever was! Why, if anything should happen to daddy — there might, while I'm here and can't take care of him! — oh, I don't know what I should do!" Fear crept over the sweet face.

"I would n't worry about it," counseled Polly cheerily. "Big men can take care of themselves better than little folks like us can."

"Daddy is n't very big," confided Chris in a low tone; "but he's strong, strong as anything! I guess there could n't much hurt him, could there?" he smiled reassuringly.

"No, indeed!" assented Polly.

"He is so strong he brought me 'way up here in his arms," the lad exulted, "and he was n't tired a bit! I wish he could come and stay with me daytimes," the wistful voice went on, "but he has to sleep then. He watches, you know."

"And you have to stay alone all night?" Polly's eyes showed sympathy.

"Oh! daddy does n't go away till after I'm asleep," the lad explained, "and he is home again before I wake up. A nice woman in the next room comes in if I call her. I never did but once, and that was when I fell out of bed. I gave a little cry before I knew anything. It did n't hurt me a mite, but she was scared, and daddy was, too. He would n't leave me the next night."

Dr. Dudley's entrance put a stop to the talk, and presently Polly said good-bye, carrying away with her a happy picture of Moses Cohn's protégé.

When Polly first saw "daddy" she was conscious of disappointment. The slight man with the cold black eyes and the hard-lined mouth did not tally with her thought of "the dearest that ever was." Yet his greeting was pleasant, and whenever he spoke to his little son a tenderness stole into his voice that made her regard him with more lenient eyes, and before her visit was over he proved himself so fascinating an entertainer, she went away feeling that the opinion of little Chris was not after all so very far from the truth.

One night "daddy" did not appear, until the sick boy, who for hours had strained his ears for the step he loved, was in a state of agitation which the combined efforts of nurse and physician failed to calm.

At last Polly was summoned, and although her arguments were not unlike those put forth by the others, they were made in such simple faith as to carry greater force.

"He'd come if he was alive! I know he would!" the boy had been tearfully reiterating. "He must be dead — oh, daddy! daddy!"

Polly entered in time to hear the last. She skipped straight to the cot.

"Now, Chris, just listen to me! Your daddy is n't dead!"

"How do you know?" he asked weakly. There was a touch of hope in the doubting tone.

"Why, we'd have heard of it long before this, if he were," she reasoned rashly.

"We might not," he objected.

"Oh, yes, we should have!" she insisted. "Because everybody knows you're at the hospital, and they'd send word to father first thing."

"They would, would n't they?" he brightened.

"Of course," she returned confidently.

"But why does n't he come?" he persisted.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied cheerfully. "Maybe he had to go away on business — father does sometimes, and can't stop for anything. But I would n't worry another bit, if I were you. When he comes and tells you all about it, you'll wonder why you did n't think it was all right — just as it is."

Chris said nothing, only gazed into Polly's

face, as if to gather even more assurance than her words had given him.

"I'm going to tell you about a blizzard we had last winter," Polly went on, "when father went to New York and mother was sick, and I was all alone." Then, seeing she had her hearer's attention, she began the story of the well-remembered February day.

Her voice was soft and soothing, and before the tale was half-told the sky-blue eyes closed and the tired little boy was asleep. This was well, as the messenger who had finally been sent to Mr. Morrow's boarding-place returned with the word that the man had not been there since early the previous day, and nobody knew where he had gone.

The next morning Chris received from his father a short letter saying that urgent business had suddenly called him to New York, where he had been most unexpectedly detained so that he might not be able to return home under a day or two, but that he should come to the hospital just as soon as he arrived in Fair Harbor. A number of beautiful post-cards were inclosed in the envelope, one of which was immediately laid aside for

Polly, and then at once exchanged for another that might be a bit more attractive. This exchange went on for some time, until she had been allotted them all in turn, and the nurse was finally called into counsel for a last decision.

When Polly came in for a flying visit before school, she was given her present, which she received with genuine pleasure, for the little card was an exquisite creation, and the fact that Chris wished her to have the very prettiest of his treasures made it doubly dear.

Three days dragged by before Mr. Morrow again appeared at the hospital. Then it was at a much later hour than usual, and the small boy was asleep. His father insisted on awakening him, however, and their meeting, the nurse asserted, was not without tears on both sides.

On the day that little Chris was to leave the hospital, Polly paid him a long visit, and there were many plans and promises for the future. It was arranged that Chris should come up to see Polly at least every Saturday, as soon as he was well enough, and until that

time Polly was to ride across the city with her father to visit him. When, at last, the six o'clock bell told of a supper that would soon be coming in on a tray, and of the one awaiting Polly at home, the good-byes had to be said. Then the lad drew from beneath his pillow a small leather case.

"I wanted to give you something," he said wistfully, "so daddy bought me this. I hope you'll like it. I think it's pretty."

Polly opened the dainty box, to find, on a cushion of white velvet, an exquisite pansy pin, with green-gold leaves, the blossom studded with sapphires and diamonds.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she cried delightedly. "I never saw anything so lovely."

"I thought you'd like it," he beamed. "Just hold it up to your neck — it looks sweet there! You'll keep it always to remember me by, won't you?"

"Forever," promised Polly. "Oh, it is so nice of your father to buy it for me!"

"He's always nice," praised Chris. "There could n't be anybody better." And for the moment Polly almost agreed with him.

But when Dr. Dudley saw the pretty ornament he looked grave.

"It is far too expensive a present for you to accept," he objected. "Diamonds and sapphires are costly stones. This must be worth a great deal of money."

"Can't I keep it then?" questioned Polly plaintively. "It will break Chris's heart if I don't."

"We need n't decide the matter to-night." He looked across the table to his wife. "What do you think?" he asked.

"I don't know," was the doubtful reply. "How can Mr. Morrow buy such jewelry, do you suppose? A night watchman's position cannot bring him very high wages."

The Doctor shook his head, and narrowed his eyes in thought. Then he began to talk of other things.

Meantime Polly was in distress. What would Chris say, if she had to give back his beautiful present which she had promised always to keep?

The next afternoon Dr. Dudley brought the matter to a climax by driving over to see the father of little Chris. Perhaps a talk with

him would put things in a different light. Thus reasoning, he rang the doorbell at Mr. Morrow's boarding-house.

"They ain't here," began the woman who answered his summons. "They got off, bag and baggage, before breakfast, this morning. He paid up all right," she exulted, "an' when they do that I'm done with 'em. He was a good payin' man straight along, I'll say that for him; but where he's gone I do' know no more 'n West Peak!"

Questioning among the boarders brought no satisfaction, and the Doctor returned home mystified and suspicious.

It was long before Polly saw little Chris again.

CHAPTER XIII

ILGA BARRON

SPRING was in Fair Harbor. Tulips and hyacinths flaunted their gay gowns in the city parks, and daffodils laughed in old-fashioned gardens. Flocks of blackbirds, by the suburb roadsides, creaked their joy in the sunshine, and robins caroled love ditties to their mates. Mrs. Jocelyn's stable, too, told of spring's coming, for there stood one of the prettiest pairs of ponies that ever trotted before a carriage.

Already Leonora was becoming an experienced little horsewoman, though whenever she drove there was always Philip, Mrs. Jocelyn's man, riding close behind. Polly had had a dozen drives with David and Jonathan, and Elsie and Brida and the others had not been forgotten.

On a Saturday morning Leonora telephoned early and invited Polly to go to Crab Cove, some six miles away. The day

was perfect, blue overhead, green along the waysides, and sunshine all around. The girls were in a merry mood.

"There's Ilga Barron out in her yard," remarked Polly, looking ahead.

"M-h'm," replied Leonora indifferently, glancing that way.

"You have n't taken her to ride yet, have you?" Polly went on.

"No, and I'm not going to," was the decided answer.

"Why, you'll have to ask her sometime, shan't you?" insisted Polly. "Say, Leonora, drive slow a minute!"

"What do you want?" began the other, a bit of impatience in her tone.

"I just happened to think," — the words were tumbling out fast, — "I've had ever so many rides, and Patricia and Lilith and Gladys have, and Ilga will feel it if she is skipped. May n't I run over and ask her to take my place for this once? I can go any time, you know! Do you mind?" for Leonora's face showed disapproval.

"Oh, dear! I don't want her!" fretted the little driver. "I wish she had n't been out

there. I wish we'd gone some other way. Yes, go ahead, if you want to!" she yielded, seeing Polly's wistful eyes. "I'll try to be good to her."

The carriage stopped in front of the big granite house, and the exchange was soon made. Ilga was only too ready for a drive behind the ponies which were the envy of every girl who saw them.

Polly waved them a gay good-bye, and turned towards home.

"I believe I'll go up to Patricia's," she said to herself. "Mother won't expect me back for an hour or two, and Patricia wanted me to see her new dresses. It'll be a good time."

Thus thinking, she took the street that led to The Trowbridge, and was presently admiring Patricia's pretty frocks. Time passed quickly, and it was nearly ten o'clock when she finally started for home.

As she rounded the corner below Lady Gay Cottage, she saw her father's automobile in front, and then the Doctor himself coming down the walk on a run.

"Oh, maybe I can go with him!" she

thought, and sprang ahead. "Father! father!" she called.

Dr. Dudley turned, and came swiftly towards her. He caught her in his arms, — "Polly!" his voice breaking as she had never heard it before. "You are n't hurt at all?" Incredulity was in his tone.

"Hurt? Why, no! How should I be?"

He left her, leaping up the steps, and throwing wide the door. She heard him call: —

"Lucy! she is here! — safe!"

Polly hurried after, to be clasped tightly in her mother's arms with excited expressions of thankfulness.

"What is it?" she pleaded. "I don't see what it all means!"

"We heard that the ponies ran away," the Doctor explained, "and that one of you was hurt — badly. Somebody thought it was not Leonora, and, of course —"

"Oh, Ilga!" broke in Polly. And she told of how the exchange had been made.

Dr. Dudley hastened away, to learn the truth of the matter, while Polly and her mother tried to settle into something like calmness.

By chance callers and over the wire came snatches of facts concerning the accident. Nobody seemed to know what had startled the ponies, but Leonora had pluckily held to the reins until a hill was reached, thereby averting injury to herself. Ilga, becoming frightened, had jumped from the carriage, with serious results. It had occurred while Philip had gone into a shop for some purchase, leaving his own horse and the little team at the curb. When he came out the ponies were dashing across the railway tracks ahead of a coming train, and he was obliged to wait behind the gates until the small carriage was out of sight.

It was not until the Doctor returned that the nature of Ilga's injuries were known.

"Dr. Palmer and Dr. Houston are attending her," the physician said. "I have heard nothing direct from them, but it is rumored that the girl's back is broken."

"Poor Ilga!" burst out Polly, and hid her face in her hands amid a torrent of tears. "It is all my fault!" she moaned. "It is all my fault! If I had n't asked her, she would n't have got hurt!"

Father and mother tried to soothe her; but her sensitive heart shouldered the entire blame of Ilga's accident, and it required much reasoning before she was able to look at the matter in a true light.

Further reports confirmed the first rumors about the unfortunate girl. It was extremely doubtful, the physicians thought, if she ever walked again. Dr. Dudley and his wife kept the sad tidings as much as possible from Polly; but she was obliged to hear talk of it at school, and often she would come home at noon only to spoil her dinner with tears.

One evening Polly was, as usual, perched on the arm of her father's chair, when he surprised her with some news.

"I had the pleasure of making Miss Ilga's acquaintance to-day."

Polly's eyes widened incredulously.

"She is at the hospital," he continued, "and has passed through a successful operation. It is too soon to be quite positive, but everything looks favorable to-night."

"Is she going to be able to walk?"

"We hope so."

Polly dropped her head on her father's shoulder, and sighed a deep sigh of joy.

"How perfectly beautiful! And to think you have done it!" She caught her breath.

The Doctor rested his cheek lightly on the sunny curls, saying nothing. They were still sitting in silence when Mrs. Dudley came in. Polly and her father understood each other without words.

The Senator's daughter carried out the hopes of the doctors to the highest degree, and there came a day when Polly, at Ilga's own request, was sent for.

Miss Hortensia Price was the sick girl's nurse, and Polly had learned with surprise that a strong friendship was growing between them. Nevertheless she was unprepared for any manifestation of it, and her joy in seeing their evident love for each other made the first moments of her visit less conscious than they otherwise might have been, for she had been wondering if her schoolmate attached any blame to her for the injuries received in the accident.

"Miss Price knows — I've told her!" — Ilga began abruptly; "but I want you to

know, for they said you cried when you heard I was hurt, and you thought it was your fault. It was n't! Not the least bit! It was all mine! Mrs. Jocelyn's man went into the store, and told us to wait. I did n't see why we should, — and I don't now, if the ponies were properly trained. I wanted just to drive around the square, but Leonora would n't; so I began to fool with the whip. I switched it about, and teased the ponies. Leonora said she'd never touched them with it, and I told her I did n't see what a whip was good for if it was n't used — and I don't! If she'd been quiet, I should n't have been so possessed about it; but she kept saying, 'Don't, Ilga! Please don't, Ilga!' and I hate being nagged. So finally I gave it a good smart flirt, and off they went like a shot! Of course, I was scared, and hardly knew what I did do. Leonora said, real low, 'Keep still! Don't stir!' I do' know as I should have jumped, if she had n't told me not to. But I did, and that's the last I knew till the doctors were fussing over me."

"But you're going to get well now!" Polly burst out delightedly.

The pale face on the pillow reflected the joy. "Yes," Ilga replied, "I guess I am, unless they all lie to me. I know Miss Price does n't," with a nodding smile towards the window where the nurse sat reading. "But I did n't s'pose I ever should one time. I don't b'lieve I should either, if it had n't been for Dr. Dudley. Polly, your father is just splendid!"

Polly's eyes suddenly filled with happy tears. This was something she had not anticipated — at least, not yet.

The nurse came with a few spoonfuls of nourishment, and the talk passed to other things; but Polly went away feeling that Ilga's praise was her apology, and that her enemy had been miraculously changed into a friend.

Yet there were hours when the old Ilga was at the front, domineering and impertinent, and Polly would be called upon to exercise all her tact and patience in order to keep things pleasant during her visits. But, little by little, as the convalescent gathered strength of body she also gained in self-control. Miss Price and Polly were her

adored examples of beautiful living, and it was plain that she was honestly trying to attain to what she admired in them, although the dissimilarity of eleven and thirty made the task somewhat more difficult.

Miss Hortensia Price seemed to Polly to be more gentle than in the old days. Or was it that she now understood her better? She could not tell; but it was as unending a wonderment as a joy that the dignified nurse and the untrained, ungoverned girl should have become such close friends.

On the day set for Ilga to try walking across her room she had planned a small tea-party for her chosen comrades.

"Would n't it be wiser, my dear, to wait until the next day?" Miss Price had suggested, not daring to hint more strongly of the possibility of the blasting of their hopes. "The excitement and pleasure of being on your feet again should be sufficient for Wednesday."

But Ilga, sanguine and joyous, wished her friends there to witness her achievement, and so the preparations had gone on.

Miss Price was to be the guest of honor,

and Polly, Patricia, David, Gustave, and June English and her brother were to make up the party. Mrs. Barron was sparing neither trouble nor money to please her daughter, and there were to be guessing contests, with prizes for the successful ones. It was quite out of Ilga's power to keep a secret, so Polly had been treated to a glimpse of the dear little pussy-head pins, with the emerald eyes, and had heard all about the odd-shaped sandwiches and the curious cakes representing animals, birds, and various other objects, the guessing of which was to be the feature of the tea. She had even peeped at one of the beautiful boxes of confections which stood ready to be given the departing guests as sweet good-byes, until she was looking forward to the party almost as joyfully as Ilga herself. And then the New York letter came.

Ilga noticed the change as soon as Polly appeared.

"What's the matter?" she asked abruptly.

Polly had been bravely trying to smile, but at the sudden question the corners of her mouth flew down.

"How'd you know there was anything?" she faltered.

"Hoh, I can read you like a book! Your mother sick?"

"No, oh, no! But I can't be here at the party!"

"Why not?" Ilga raised herself on her elbow.

"We had a letter from Cousin Floyd last night, and they want me to come to New York Wednesday morning."

"Well, you are n't obliged to go, if they do! Oh, you have n't a bit of spunk!"

"It is n't that, Ilga. Father thinks I ought to go, seeing it's my vacation, and so does mother. Two of my girl cousins that I have n't ever seen are going to sail for Germany in a day or two, and they are n't coming back for years, maybe, and they want me to help them receive at their farewell party —"

"Oh, yes! I s'pose their party 's better 'n mine!" Ilga burst out scornfully. "If you do go, Polly Dudley, let me tell you I'll never speak —"

"My dear!" Miss Price arrested the rash

words on Ilga's lips, and took the hot cheeks between her cool palms.

The excited girl sobbed out her penitence and her disappointment in the nurse's arms, while Polly sat by, distressed at the way things were going.

When the tears were spent, the three talked the matter over quietly, — or as quietly as Ilga would allow. At first she decided peremptorily that if Polly could not be there she would have no party at all; but arguments and persuasions finally had their effect, and the plans were left unaltered, Glen Stewart being chosen in place of Polly.

CHAPTER XIV

POLLY IN NEW YORK

POLLY'S first journey by herself caused a good deal of excitement in Lady Gay Cottage. Mrs. Dudley was a little nervous at thought of it, the Doctor wondered at the very last moment if he had been unwise to allow her to go alone, and for Polly herself the new experience almost pushed Ilga Barron and the tea-party from her mind. But the miles were traveled without any startling adventure, and in two hours she was in New York, with Cousin Floyd clasping her in his arms and telling her how glad he was to see her.

The next days were so crammed with novel sights and undreamed-of pleasures that Polly felt as if she were in a new kind of merry-go-round and must stop and take breath. But she whirled on and on, in company with her cousins and other girls and boys, and everybody was so kind and so gay

that she found not a moment to be homesick or lonely in, although Fair Harbor seemed a very long way off.

From the first she and her Cousin Harold were comrades. They discovered that they had read the same books, that they enjoyed the same sports, that they loved the same flowers and songs and fairy-tale heroes. Harold had always envied boys with sisters, and now his dream of a sister for himself seemed actually to have come to pass — only he knew that the waking time must be soon.

Ever since it had been decided that Polly should come to New York she had wondered with a vague fear if her relatives would urge her to remain with them; but for a few days nothing was said of it. Then Harold spoke out.

"I wish you were really my sister," he told her, as they stood together watching the antics of some monkeys at the Hippodrome; "then we could come here every Saturday."

"You could n't come," Polly laughed. "You'd be away at school."

"No," was the serious reply, "I should get

father to let me go to school here. If you'd stay and be my cousin-sister, it would be just exactly as good — oh, Polly! won't you?"

Her lips drooped sorrowfully. "I can't! truly I can't!" she answered, just as she had answered his brother, in Fair Harbor.

Then they went past the cage of the very funniest monkeys of all, and Harold did not even smile.

The day before the one set for Polly's going home she was given a grand party by her cousins, and Uncle Maurice ordered the affair with a free hand. She had never seen a house so converted into a garden of flowers. Wandering about from room to room, she and Harold watched the men as they placed potted plants, twined garlands, banked windows and fireplaces with vines and blossoms, and arranged pretty nooks of greenery and color. Finally they sat down in a little make-believe arbor of roses, Polly busily admiring everything.

Harold was more quiet; he was even grave. At last his thoughts became words.

"Oh, Polly, stay with me! do! I want you!"

"Why, Harold, you know I told you I could n't!" she answered, almost reprovingly.

"I know you say so," he retorted; "but you can! You can as well as not! You just don't want to — that's why! But I think you might, to please me! Do, Polly!"

She plucked a bit of green from her cousin's coat sleeve before she replied.

"I don't see how I could leave father and mother," she said softly. "You would n't want to give up your home here and your father and brothers to go and live with me."

"Yes, I would!" was the unexpected response. "I'd go in a minute! Polly, I'd go anywhere or do anything for you!"

The boy believed it, and, looking into his earnest eyes, Polly almost believed it, too. She did not know how to answer. Then she shifted the viewpoint.

"But father and mother — you don't think of them! How could they get along without any little girl? — without me?"

Harold thought and sighed. This was a new light on the matter.

"No, they could n't," he admitted slowly.

"They've known you longer than I have, and I don't see how they could give you up. Well, I suppose I shall have to let you go." He looked the disconsolate lover, instead of the merry-hearted boy of ten.

Two weeks before, when Polly's small trunk had been packed, she had begged to be allowed to take with her the parting present of Chris Morrow, for hitherto there had been no occasion grand enough to warrant its being used. At first Mrs. Dudley had been in doubt, but after a few quite reasonable arguments on the part of Polly the little case had been tucked into a safe corner. The beautiful ornament had already fastened Polly's sash a number of times, and it was again called into service for the home party. She was in a hurry when the maid clasped it, for Harold was calling her to come out in the hall and see the caterers bring the things in, and before the evening was half spent her sash was trailing out of place and the pin missing. Hastily she confided to her cousin her misfortune, and together they searched up and down the rooms. Finally, just as Harold was starting to tell

Floyd of the loss, they heard a cry of surprise from one of the guests not far away, and they saw that the pansy pin was in her hand.

"I found it right down here!" the girl was saying excitedly. "Where do you s'pose it came from? Oh, it's just like one my sister had that was stolen by a burglar last winter — why!" as the back of the pin was disclosed, "it is hers! There's the 'B' I scratched one day, and Tip gave me an awful scolding for it! I was going to scratch my whole name, but she caught me too quick — my, did n't she come at me!"

Harold waited for no more.

"It belongs to my cousin," he explained. "She just lost it from her sash, and we've been hunting everywhere for it."

He held out his hand for the ornament, but the finder clasped it tightly in her palm.

"It is my sister's," she declared. "The burglars —"

"Botheration!" he cried. "Of course, it is n't the same pin! This one is Polly's. It was a present to her, and she thinks a lot of it."

"But I scratched the 'B' —"

"Probably somebody else scratched this. Did you, Polly?" turning to his cousin.

"No," she admitted slowly, "I did n't; but I noticed the 'B,' and wondered how it came to be there. I don't see how it could have been your sister's," she said, addressing the girl who still kept the pin hidden in her hand. "Chris's father bought it for him to give to me."

Those most interested in this little controversy were now surrounded by the young guests who were eager to know the cause of the dispute. Floyd and Julian pressed near, but before they reached Polly's side she had bravely settled the question.

"Keep the pin," she yielded gently. "I should not wish to have it back again if you think it belongs to your sister. Come, Harold!" and turning from the little crowd she ran into the arms of Floyd.

He drew her away to a retired spot, followed only by the eyes of a few curious ones, and the story was told, beginning with little Chris and ending with Bertha Kingstone.

Polly was close to tears as she finished,

and Harold was openly indignant that she should have allowed Bertha to keep the pin.

"Of course, there are two pins!" he declared vehemently. "This one never belonged to Tip Kingstone. If you don't get it away from her, Floyd Westwood, I will!" His flashing eyes emphasized his hot words, and he would have carried out his threat if it had not been for his brother's authoritative advice to let things be as they had fallen until their father could be consulted.

This little episode came near upsetting the party, but Aunt Sally Calhoun was a diplomat of no mean degree, and under her tactful management things quickly regained their smooth course. Yet Polly went to sleep that night wishing with all her heart that she had never brought her precious pansy pin to New York.

The next morning, just as she was putting on her hat and coat to go to the station, a maid appeared at her door with a card. She read, engraved in small script, "Bertha Curtis Kingstone," and she wondered with a joyful wonder why she had come to see her.

The girl that met her downstairs in the reception room seemed a very different Bertha from the one of the night before. She held out the pin.

"Mother says I have no right to this," she began abruptly, "and I beg your pardon for keeping it." The words were spoken in a low, monotonous voice, as if they were a lesson. "I am sorry I was so rude, and I trust you will excuse me."

Polly was at once generous.

"Oh, it may be yours!" she responded. "I'm afraid I ought not to take it back."

"Mercy!" the other broke out, "I guess you'll have to! I've had scoldings enough over the old pin! I would n't carry it home again for a bushel of 'em!"

"I am sorry you have been scolded," sympathized Polly.

"Oh, I don't care!" Bertha returned. "I'm used to it. But I hate to apologize — that 's the worst of doing things. Good-bye!"

Polly ran to find Harold, to share with him her joy in the restored pin; but the lad was not to be seen. Nor did he appear to bid

her good-bye, although she lingered to search for him until she came near missing her train. What could have happened? Fear haunted her all the way home.

HAROLD WESTWOOD!

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

ONE of Polly's first questions on her return was of Ilga Barron. If she had not been so over-occupied while in New York, the fact that not a word was written her of Ilga would have given her great concern. As it was she had had only time for brief surprise on receipt of letter or card; then it would slip from her mind. But now she eagerly awaited her mother's answer. It was slow in coming, and then was accompanied by an ominous shake of the head.

"Ilga's party day ended sadly. Her first few steps were such a joy that she forgot herself, and started on with a skip. Her foot caught —"

"Oh!" cried Polly in consternation, "did she fall?"

Mrs. Dudley nodded, hastening to say, "Your father thinks she will come out all

right in time, but there will have to be a long waiting. She realizes it is her own fault, for Miss Price warned her to be careful; but that does n't make it any easier to bear."

"Poor Ilga!" mourned Polly. "While I was having such a splendid time she was feeling so bad! I'll go to see her right away, and tell her all about my visit. Perhaps that will help her to forget."

So Polly found her work waiting for her, and she took it up with her usual readiness; but it was hard to settle into the regular school routine after the exciting whirl of that gay fortnight. Cards had come from Floyd and Harold, but the absence of the latter when she left them was not even mentioned. This she could not understand, for she had expected an apology as the very least amends he could make. Taken altogether such rudeness seemed to Polly unpardonable, after Harold's protested affection. Still his message was as warm-hearted and loving as ever, and she wisely tried to put the matter aside as one of the things that could not be explained away.

When she had been at home a week, and

New York was beginning to fade into the past, she returned from afternoon school to find nobody in sight as she entered the back door. Quietly she went through the house, and hearing voices in the library she halted to ascertain if there were company. A few words arrested her.

"It is a shame for you to have to do so much for so little," Mrs. Dudley was saying.

The Doctor laughed softly. Polly could almost hear his eyes twinkle.

"You, too!" he retorted.

"Nonsense!" she protested; "all I'm doing is to try to keep the household expenses down as low as possible."

"And that is the main thing. You have done admirably. I hoped we could be out of pinch before long — and now this cut-down in salary!"

"Never mind! we shall get on all right," came in Mrs. Dudley's cheery tones.

"Of course," the Doctor agreed; "but it means too much scrimp for you. It is what I did not anticipate. If I had more time for outside practice" — he stopped, as if musing. "And if it were n't for the coal bill!"

"That coal bill is your bugbear," laughed his wife. "Don't worry, Robert! It is n't like you. Winship is n't bothering you about it, is he?"

"Not a bit. It is only that I hate debt, and —"

Polly involuntarily tiptoed away, feeling strangely guilty at having overheard what was not intended for her ears. So her father's salary had been cut down! And it was small enough before! She had heard the coal bill spoken of awhile ago, — yes, when she was getting ready for New York, — but she had given it no thought. And her mother had bought her new things to wear! Distress swept her heart. She was an added expense — ought she to have gone to live with her uncle? He was rich. He could pay his coal bills. He was never in pinch. Oh! did her father and mother wish she had gone? There was no peace for Polly. Dutifully she crept over to the hospital to see Ilga, but found her in a pettish mood, and she returned home more disturbed than before. She longed to offer her bank money again, but she knew it would be of no use. Besides, she did not wish

her father and mother to know she had been eavesdropping. She blushed with shame at the thought. Why had she not run away at once, or gone boldly into the room. Oh, how she wished she had!

Bedtime found her in the same frame of mind, although she tried to appear as if nothing had occurred. She had bidden her mother good-night, and her foot was on the stair, when the doorbell rang.

"I'll go," she called softly into the library, and then skipped to answer the summons.

As the door opened she gave a surprised little scream.

"Harold Westwood!"

The boy darted inside, clasping his cousin with a glad cry.

"I supposed you were at boarding-school," Polly told him.

"I was," the lad replied a bit shamefacedly. Then bravely, "I ran away to see you!"

"Why, Harold!"

"I don't care!" was the dogged response. "I had to!"

"I should n't think they'd have let you

come in the night," said Polly, leading him into the library.

The introduction relieved the lad of the necessity of an answer; but Polly innocently plied her questions.

"Why did n't Julian come, too? Was it a half-holiday?"

For an instant Harold looked disconcerted. Then he replied boldly: —

"Jule does n't know! I tell you, I ran away!"

Polly's eyes widened in astonishment. Mrs. Dudley smiled understandingly.

"I gave the conductor my watch for security," the boy went on. "I told him how 't was, and he let me ride, — I guess out of his own pocket. He was a good one! You see, I spent all my money in a jiffy for the first part of the way and something to eat. I did n't s'pose tickets cost so much."

"You dear child!" murmured Mrs. Dudley, her eyes soft with sympathy. Then she caught him in her arms, as if he had been a baby.

"Have you had any supper?"

A weary little negative sent her into the

pantry, and soon the hungry lad was eating bread and butter and cheese and cookies, and feasting his eyes upon Polly at the same time.

"Say, where in the world were you when I came away from your house?" was the sudden inquiry.

"Out in the garage," Harold answered promptly.

"But did n't you hear us call?"

He nodded, his lips puckered into a half-smile.

"Why did n't you answer, then?" Polly was plainly puzzled.

"Because," he blurted out defiantly, "I was n't coming to say good-bye for anybody!"

"Perhaps you thought, with Dickens," interposed Mrs. Dudley considerately, "that it is easier to act good-bye than to say it."

"It is!" declared Harold, wagging his head. "I guess he knew!"

Over the wires, after the children were asleep, went messages to school and home that banished anxiety, and then the Doctor and his wife talked long into the night. It had been a disturbing day.

At breakfast Harold announced his intention of remaining in Fair Harbor and going to school with Polly, but an early telegram from his father ended his happy planning. He scowled as he read the yellow slip.

"Return to school at once, and behave yourself."

"Botheration!" he grumbled, "I s'pose I'll have to! Pop always means what he says."

Yet the lad enjoyed his breakfast, judging by the number of bananas and muffins that disappeared from his plate, until Polly, thinking of yesterday's overheard talk, wondered what they should have done if her cousin had followed out his desire. Bananas cost; she was not so sure about muffins. In consequence of which she restricted her own appetite to the latter, and made her mother question if she were quite well, to pass by her favorite fruit.

Equipped with tickets for the journey and sufficient money to redeem his watch, besides a generous luncheon, Harold was put aboard the ten o'clock train. Notwithstanding his longing heart, he carried himself pluckily, consoled by Mrs. Dudley's invitation to spend

a week of his summer's vacation in Fair Harbor. Yet she saw him suspiciously sweep his eyes with the back of his hand as the train whirled him off, and she sighed in sympathy, thinking, "Poor little fellow! he needs a mother!"

CHAPTER XVI

ROSES AND THORNS

DAVID pulled a rose from the little bush by the house corner, and began to chew its petals.

"Don't do that!" begged Polly. "It does n't want to be eaten up."

The boy laughed, looking ruefully down at the jagged edges of the flower.

"It is n't sweet anyway," he argued. "If I were a rose I'd be sweet, and I would n't have thorns. But then," he went on thoughtfully, "people are a good deal like roses. Some are sweet, and some are n't; but 'most everybody has thorns somewhere."

"I guess one of mine's laziness," sighed Polly, "and it's been pricking the teachers all this week. I hate to study such warm weather! I want to stay outdoors instead of being shut up in a stuffy room."

"It is horrid," agreed Patricia, "but I don't dare be lazy. I have to get good reports

to send back to Nevada. If I did n't stand high, papa'd have a conniption."

"I'm going to study better next week," decided Polly, "so I'll be a thornless rose, like you."

"Dear me, I have thorns enough!" Patricia laughed. "Mamma says I'm selfish and careless and, oh, I don't know what! So, you see, they scratch her. What's your thorn, David?"

"Jealousy," he replied promptly.

Patricia looked surprised.

"Who are you jealous of?" she queried curiously.

"Nobody just this minute." He threw a furtive glance in Polly's direction, over the rose he was nipping again; but she was occupied with the tendrils of a vine that were wandering from their support.

"I wish we had some Lady Gay roses to cover our old bare piazza," he broke out abruptly. "Yours are fine." He looked admiringly towards the little cottage next door, now beautiful in its bloom and greenery.

"Has n't anybody bought your house yet, has there?" asked Patricia.

"No," Polly answered, "not that we've heard of. Father says the price is too high."

"Lucky for you," remarked David. "And lucky for us, too," he laughed. "I don't know but Uncle David would want to sell out if you folks should leave."

"Why don't you have some roses?" questioned Polly, coming back to the flowers. She gazed up at the stately columns, free of living adornment, and decided the matter quickly.

"They'd make it lovely!" she beamed. "Silver Moons would be splendid all over these pillars, and Lady Gays on the side piazza. Mrs. Jocelyn has an elegant Silver Moon, roses as big as that," — curving her fingers into as wide a circle as they could compass, — "just single white, with great yellow anthers — oh, they're beautiful! I wish your uncle would get some. Why don't you ask him, David?"

"You may," he evaded.

"I believe you don't dare," Polly cried. "David Collins, are you afraid of him yet? Why, I don't see how you can be, he is so nice."

The lad laughed. "I suppose I can't quite get over those years I stood in such awe of him," he confessed. "But," he added, "he's fine; nobody could be finer."

"Polly was telling me the other day," put in Patricia, "about the time she and Colonel Gresham chased after Dr. Dudley for you. I wish I could have seen Lone Star go."

"There! I have n't had a glimpse of Lone Star for a week!" Polly broke out. "Is he in the stable, David? Let's go and see him!"

Away they raced, to visit the famous trotter, and to feed him with bread and butter and sugar which David begged from the cook. They were still petting the affectionate animal when Colonel Gresham walked in.

"Ah, I've caught you!" he growled. "Now I know what makes my horse have indigestion!"

Patricia, looking a bit scared, stopped short in her feeding; but Lone Star nosed down to the piece of bread in her hand.

David and Polly chuckled, understanding the Colonel better, and Patricia, seeing

his laughing eyes, at once recovered herself.

"Who wants to go to ride with Lone Star and me?" Colonel Gresham asked.

There was a duet of "I's" from the girls. David said nothing.

"Sorry my buggy will permit of only one invitation. We shall have to draw cuts, shan't we?"

Three lengths of straw were made, the Colonel arranging them as if he were used to the business. The children eyed them with lively interest.

"You choose first, Patricia," Polly said, and they watched breathlessly while her fingers wavered in front of the big, steady hand before daring to pull.

Finally she plucked at one. It was the longest of all.

"Oh, dear!" she lamented.

"Now, Polly!" bade David.

"That will leave you Hobson's choice," she laughed; but he motioned her on, and she caught at the nearest one.

It was an inch shorter than the remaining straw, and she smiled up at the Colonel.

"Miss Dudley, may Lone Star and I have the pleasure of your comradeship for the next hour?" he invited, bowing low.

"I shall be very happy to go," she laughed, sweeping him a little curtsy.

Presently the carriage was ready, Polly and the Colonel jumped in, and Patricia and David sent merry good-byes in the wake of Lone Star's flying feet.

"I can't help being glad I won," confessed Polly, drawing a long breath of delight at the drive in store for her.

Colonel Gresham smiled responsively, tucked the linen duster a little closer, asked her if she were quite comfortable, and then began a little story in the life of his favorite horse.

As they passed through the pleasant streets, between front dooryards banked with flowers, the talk after a while led quite naturally to climbing roses for the Colonel's own house.

"If only you could see Mrs. Jocelyn's roses!" Polly wished. "There could n't be any lovelier ones."

She told him of the great single Silver

Moons, and pictured them on his own piazza, until he said he must surely have some.

"Oh!" cried Polly, the thought suddenly popping into her head, "why can't we go round to Mrs. Jocelyn's and see hers? It won't be very much out of our way, and then you can tell just how they'll look. You know Mrs. Jocelyn, don't you?"

Colonel Gresham nodded gravely.

"Then you won't mind going to see her roses, shall you?" Polly chattered on. "She has a big rose garden at the side of the house, lots of beautiful ones; but I 'most know you'll like the Silver Moon kind best."

"I don't believe I like any kind of roses," the Colonel broke out abruptly. "They have too many thorns. Somebody would always be getting scratched if they were on my piazza. I reckon I won't have them, after all."

Polly started to speak, looked up, and then shut her lips on the words. The stern set of her companion's face forbade talk. Yet in a moment it softened, the words came again, and this time they were not forced back.

"Roses are so beautiful, and the thorns are so little I forget about them." She halted, but the Colonel did not respond.

"Once when I was a very small girl," she went on, "I picked a rose in our yard, and scratched my hand so it bled. I ran, crying, to mamma; but she did n't pay any attention to that, only told me to look at the rose. It was a lovely tea rose, the color of sunset when the sky is all yellow with just a bit of a pink flush. She talked about it, till I forgot my finger. When I happened to recollect, the hurt seemed so little compared with that beautiful rose. I guess that's why I don't mind thorns any more. I've always remembered it."

"A good thing to remember," spoke out Colonel Gresham fervently, "and a blessed thing to live up to — if only we could! But some thorns pierce deep!"

He did not look at Polly. One might have thought him talking to Lone Star, for his eyes were on the horse's head.

"Yes, some are bigger than others," Polly replied innocently. "They hurt more. But Silver Moon does n't have very many.

Oh," she cried earnestly, thinking of the rose, "I do wish you could see those of Mrs. Jocelyn's! Is n't it funny," she went on musingly, "how she always calls you David, just as if you were one of her very best friends! Only very best friends call each other by their first names, do they? I mean grown-up people. I guess she thinks a lot of you. Sometimes her eyes — you know what dark, shiny eyes she has — well, sometimes when she's talking about you they get so bright and soft, they're just beautiful! I think she is a lovely lady, don't you?"

"I presume she is, from what I hear," replied the Colonel. "I have n't seen her in a long time. But how comes it that she speaks of me? I can't see any occasion for it."

"Oh, I don't know! She talks of you very often. She thinks a lot of David. You know he goes up there with me a good deal."

"David Collins! — goes up to see Mrs. Jocelyn?" Colonel Gresham was plainly surprised.

"Why, not Mrs. Jocelyn exactly, but Leonora. Did n't he ever say anything about it? We go up 'most every week."

"Ah, yes, Leonora! I had forgotten. She is the adopted child?"

Polly recounted the story of Leonora's adoption, to which the Colonel listened attentively; but he made few comments, and when it ended he was silent.

Polly did not know what to think of Colonel Gresham to-day; in fact she began to feel as if she were not quite acquainted with him. She was strangely reminded of that other day, not a year ago, when she chose her happy reward, "to the half of his kingdom." If he were like this at home, she wondered no more that David sometimes refrained from asking him questions. She was still thinking about it, when, suddenly, his customary genial manner returned, and they reached home in such high spirits that David would have been surprised to have learned that any part of the drive had been passed in silence.

CHAPTER XVII

A SUMMER NIGHT MYSTERY

DAVID COLLINS was on the piazza with a book when he heard the call. He sprang up and ran to the end towards Lady Gay Cottage.

"Hullo, Pollee! What is it?"

"Can you come over? I'm all alone. Mother's gone to ride with the Scribners, and father's up in Forestford at a consultation."

"I'll come right now. Say, this is a dandy book! Shall I bring it along?"

By the time the story was finished, David reading it aloud, it was too dusky for another, and the children sat and talked, one in the hammock, the other in the lounging-chair.

Presently Colonel Gresham drove out. David watched him, while Polly indulged in her usual admiration of Lone Star. The carriage was out of sight before the boy turned his eyes from the road where it had vanished.

"I do wonder where he is going," he sighed.

"Probably to give the poor horse some fresh air and exercise," responded Polly. "I see him go out nearly every night about this time."

"Yes, I know," returned David grimly, "but it is n't just for Lone Star's health."

"Maybe it's business then. Did you wish you were with him?"

"Oh, no, not that at all!" David hastened to say. "Perhaps I ought n't to speak of it — I should n't only to you. But I know you won't tell."

"Tell what?" laughed Polly. "I don't know anything to tell, and I would n't tell it if I did!"

"I don't know either — wish I could find out; then we'd know what to expect."

"What do you mean, David Collins? Why do you care where your uncle goes?"

"Because it may make a great deal of difference to mamma and me. We're dreadfully worried."

Polly's face took on an anxious shadow.

"You're not afraid he's — getting to gambling — or drinking, are you?" Her voice dropped almost to a whisper.

David stared as if he doubted his hearing; then he threw back his head, and laughed.

"Uncle David — gambling! drinking! Oh, Pollee! that's too funny! oh, my!"

Polly laughed, too, out of sympathy.

"Well, you said, —" she began in excuse.

"I did n't say anything of that kind — oh, Polly! No, we are n't worried about Uncle David's habits."

"Well, what is it, then? I'm not going to guess any more."

"I would n't," giggled David.

"Anyway I've made you laugh," exulted Polly. "You have been as grave as an owl all the evening."

"Let me tell you — then you won't wonder I'm grave."

"I'll let you all right," Polly chuckled.

David was too seriously troubled to notice.

"It is this way," he went on; "you know how Uncle David has always taken us to ride after supper, either mamma or me alone, or both in the surrey — he has ever since it was mild enough."

"Why, yes, I've gone with you lots of times."

"And now he takes somebody else — a lady, nearly every night!"

"It is too bad," Polly returned plaintively. "We'd love to have you go with us, if we could only go ourselves; but father can't get away, and —"

"Oh, I don't mean that!" David burst out. "It is n't because we're so anxious for a drive; but, Polly, don't you see? If Uncle David is taking a lady out every night, it means something!"

"What does it mean?" queried Polly in a puzzled voice.

"Why, that he is going to be married!"

"O-h!"

"And that means that mamma and I must get out!"

"No, it does n't!"

"Mamma says so." David's head came down with decision. "Mamma would n't stay to be in the way, and, oh, dear! Now you see why we are so worried."

"But how do you know he takes a lady to ride?"

"Because I've seen her."

"Who is it?"

"I can't tell — that's the trouble. We have known he went out alone, but we did n't think much about it till a week or so ago. I'd been up to Archie Howard's, and was coming home through Oregon Avenue, — you know how shady it is up there, — and just along by the Woodruffs' Uncle David whirled past me. I guess I was looking so hard to make sure it was he that I did n't notice the lady much, but it was n't a man."

"Was that all? That does n't mean anything! Maybe he just happened to pick her up on her way home. He knows 'most everybody."

"No, he did n't! If he did, he picked her up again two nights afterward, for I was down on Curtis Street, and just before I got to the avenue there they were! They were going like lightning, and I could n't make out any more than I could before. The lady was on the other side of Uncle David; but I'm sure it was the same one."

"But could n't he take a lady to ride without marrying her?" asked Polly slowly.

"Why, I suppose some men do," answered David; "but mamma says when a man of his age — who has n't been round with the ladies for years and years — takes one out evening after evening, it is n't for nothing. And mamma says, of course, when he brings a wife home we can't stay. Oh, I don't know what we shall do! I thought we should live here with Uncle David always. It is making mamma just sick. I know she keeps thinking of those dreadful years before he made up, and if we've got to go back to them again!"

"I would n't worry," soothed Polly. "Maybe it is n't anything at all. I don't b'lieve he'll get married. If he'd been going to, he'd have done it before he got so old."

"He is n't very old. He's only a little over fifty."

"That's old to get married, is n't it?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied David absently.

"Well, I shall be married before I'm fifty," announced Polly decidedly.

David laughed.

"Who you going to marry?" he chuckled.

"Why, of course I don't know yet," she

responded; "but I shan't wait till I'm fifty years old."

"No, I guess you won't," he agreed.

The sound of light hoofs speeding down the street turned the attention from the weighty subject of marriage back to the Colonel himself.

"That is n't he, it's a little man," observed Polly.

"I knew it was n't Lone Star's step," David replied. "Besides, he does n't come home so early as this."

"Oh, say," Polly broke out in an undertone of excitement, "let's go up on Oregon Avenue! Maybe we should meet them!"

"I don't suppose they always go that way," mused David; "but it would n't do any harm to take a walk —"

"No, come on!" urged Polly, jumping up. "But I must lock the house first. Mother has a key."

"I'll help," volunteered David, following Polly into the front hall.

With windows and doors secure behind them, the two started for Oregon Avenue, Polly talking all the way.

"It was along here that you saw them, was n't it?" she questioned softly, as if fearful that her voice might carry to the piazza parties that lined the pleasant street.

"Just about," David answered; "but it's lighter further on. There's a carriage block in front of that big gray house where you can sit down and rest."

"I'm not a bit tired," Polly insisted, yet to please David she sat dutifully on the stone indicated for at least three minutes; then she suddenly decided that it was too conspicuous, and they moved on up the avenue.

The night was warm and still. Occasionally a puff of cooler air would meet the children at some dusky driveway or odorous garden, and they would halt to enjoy it. From dark verandas and brilliant houses laughter and song floated out to them as they passed along. Altogether this stalking Colonel Gresham was rather a delightful affair, and sometimes in the pleasure of the moment their errand would be almost forgotten.

Not many carriages were abroad, and this was not one of the highways frequented

by motor-cars. Every vehicle, therefore, claimed the children's attention. Far up the avenue, on a corner where an arc light cast fitful shadows over the intersecting roadways, they stopped to catch a breeze straying up from the harbor. Polly was blithely chattering.

"'Sh!" whispered David.

The sound of hoofs came faintly through the stillness.

"I believe it is!" Polly whispered back.

David nodded eagerly.

"Dear me, how that light bobs up and down!" Polly complained. "I hope it will be bright when they get here."

"Let's stand in the shadow!" David pulled her under a broad maple tree.

On came the hoofs, nearer, nearer. The light suddenly flared.

"Oh, goody!" exulted Polly.

"It is Lone Star!" whispered David.

The familiar horse appeared in the flickering circle of light. Behind him the form of a man and a woman were barely discernible — then utter darkness! Lone Star trotted by the discomfited two, and was gone. The

light did not come back. The children clutched each other in silent disappointment. Polly was the first to find words.

"Was n't that just mean?"

David laughed — a grim little laugh.

"Don't! It hurts. I'm too mad to laugh."

He chuckled. Then he grabbed Polly excitedly.

"Come on!" he cried.

"Where?" breathlessly hurrying along by his side.

"The avenue makes a big curve above here, before it gets to the fork, and we can go straight up this next street and head 'em off, maybe — they're going pretty slow."

"I don't b'lieve we can."

"We'll try it anyhow. You're not tired?"

"Oh, no!"

Racing over long stretches, slowing to catch breath, then running again, — thus the fork was finally reached. But no Lone Star or the thud of his feet greeted eyes or ears.

"I might have known we could n't go as fast as Lone Star!" David exclaimed disgustedly.

"You don't s'pose they've gone up to

Cherry Hill Park, do you?" questioned Polly. "It's just above here, you know."

"Perhaps. Want to try it?"

Of course she did, and on they trudged, taking note of neither time nor distance, until all at once Polly was conscious of weariness.

"It seems further afoot than in an automobile, does n't it?" she laughed.

"Yes," nodded David; "but we're almost there. Wonder which road they'd be likely to take."

Polly could not even guess, so they followed the driveways at random, on, and on, and on.

There was no lack of company. Young men and women, walking cozily close; wandering lovers from over the sea, like children hand in hand; groups of laughing, chattering girls and boys; — all these, but never a Lone Star or a dignified Colonel with his possible sweetheart.

"Let's sit down and rest," proposed David. "You must be tired."

They dropped on a convenient bench, and Polly let go a sleepy little yawn.

"I don't believe there's any use in waiting round here," began David.

Polly did not reply. Her head was drooping.

The lad drew her gently to his shoulder.

"I guess — I was 'most — asleep," she said drowsily, and shut her eyes again.

The passers-by glanced curiously at the two on the bench. Soon there were few to look, then none at all.

David leaned his head against the slatted back. It was not an easy pillow, but it gave the needed relief, and he slept.

"David Collins, I b'lieve you're fast asleep!"

It roused the boy with a start. He gave a little shamefaced laugh.

"I don't see what made me do it," he apologized.

"Well, we'd better go home as quick as we can get there," decided Polly. "What time do you s'pose it is?"

Neither could tell, but presently a town clock struck ten.

"That is n't so bad as I thought," giggled Polly. "But what will the folks say!"

They hurried along the path, till, suddenly, David halted.

"Did we pass this big fountain?" he questioned abruptly.

"I — don't remember it," Polly faltered.

"We're on the wrong path," he hastily concluded. "Let's go back!"

They wheeled about, and were soon following a driveway that they were sure led to the park entrance. Yet they trudged on and on, and still the green expanse, dotted with trees, flower-beds, and shrubbery seemed to stretch endlessly before them.

"Seems 's if we ought to get somewhere pretty soon," observed Polly, a plaintive note in her voice.

David replied absently. He was thinking hard. Where was that big stone gateway? He strained his eyes in a vain endeavor to discern it in the distance.

"What if we could n't find our way out, and they had to come and look for us!" pondered Polly. "Only they would n't know where to look!"

"Oh, we're not lost!" exclaimed David, in what he tried to make a fearless tone; but

Polly, as well as he himself, knew it to be a fib, spoken only to hold their fast-going courage.

"Let's stop a minute, and see if we can't tell where we are," proposed Polly, just as if that were not what they had been doing, at brief intervals, ever since they had passed the unfamiliar fountain.

They had come to no satisfactory conclusion, and were still peering sharply into their surroundings, when Polly spied a figure in the path ahead.

"There's a boy!" she whispered. "We can ask him."

As the lad approached, something in his easy swing seemed familiar.

"It looks like —" began Polly — "why, it is! Oh, Cornelius!" she cried excitedly, as the light showed the unmistakable features of her friend of the convalescent ward. She sprang forward to greet him.

"Holy saints!" ejaculated Cornelius O'Shaughnessy. "However come you kids out here, this time o' night?"

They told their story in breathless snatches, omitting only what had brought them hither.

"Come f'r a walk, did ye!" sniffed Cornelius. "Wal, ye've had it sure! Now, see here! I've got to go over on North Second Street to git a receipt f'r some cake Cousin Ellen give my mother, or I'll ketch it when the show's out — that's where my mother is now! She says, the last thing, 'Cornelius, mind yer don't forgit to go up after that receipt, f'r I want to make th' cake in th' mornin'!' I says, 'Sure I won't!' — and I never thought of it again till just as I was goin' up to bed! It happened to pop into my head, and if I did n't hustle down those stairs! An' here I be! Now ye just sit down and wait, and I'll go 'long back wid ye."

The boy darted into the shadows and was lost. Polly and David felt more alone than before.

"Queer, we should meet him 'way out here, at this time!" David had lowered his voice, as if fearful of being overheard.

"He came just to find us," purred Polly. "What a nice boy he is!"

"Don't talk so loud!" cautioned David.

"He can't hear. He's too far away."

"Somebody might."

"There is n't anybody," she laughed, yet involuntarily she was obeying David's injunction.

They sat there on the bench what seemed a very long time, still Cornelius did not appear.

"Let's walk along a little way and meet him," proposed Polly.

The deserted park seemed vastly more lonely than an empty street. Polly kept up a soft chatter. David wished silently that Cornelius would come. The shrubbery that bordered the way made weird shadows along the path, and more than once David had to grip his courage in a hurry to keep from halting in the face of some grotesque shade. Queer little prickles crept up and down his legs. Why did n't Cornelius come!

"You're not afraid?" he whispered, as Polly clutched his arm more tightly in passing a clump of dogwoods.

"Oh, no!" she chirped contentedly, the harmless shadows behind them, "not with you!"

The boy's retreating courage came back. He felt himself grown suddenly taller and

stronger. He walked forward with a firm, steady step.

"We must n't go too far, or Cornelius might miss us," warned Polly. "There he is now!" as the straight little figure swung into sight.

The three had a merry walk home, notwithstanding the distance and the haunting fear in the hearts of two of them that there would be anxiety because of their unexplained absence. Cornelius insisted on accompanying them to within a block of home, and then he stood on the corner and watched them away.

Mrs. Dudley met them at the foot of the steps, both hands outstretched.

"Children! where have you been?"

Polly felt nearer than usual to a real reprimand, and she hurried to explain.

"We did n't mean to be gone so long, but we got lost in Cherry Hill Park —"

"Cherry Hill Park! What in the world started you up there this hot night?"

"Why, we went up on Oregon Avenue, and then thought we'd just go over to the park, and we got tired, — or I did, — and

we sat down on a bench and went to sleep — both of us!" Polly giggled at the remembrance. "Then we could n't tell which way to go, and Cornelius came along, and he had to do an errand for his mother, and we waited a good while for him — and that's why we did n't come before."

"Well, you have had a time! You'd better run right home, David, for your mother is worried. She supposed you were over here, and came to see what kept you."

"Is Uncle David home?" questioned the boy tentatively.

"I think she said not."

Polly's eyes and David's met in tacit understanding — the secret was Colonel Gresham's, and not to be spoken of. Then the boy whirled towards home.

"Good-night!" called Polly, and to the accompaniment of fleeting footfalls came the answering "Good-night!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AT MIDVALE SPRINGS

POLLY'S worry about her father's reduced salary and the unpaid coal bill did not wholly leave her mind, but returned at intervals with ever renewing force. At these times she still wondered if she ought to have gone to live with Uncle Maurice; yet the thought of it brought such terror to her heart that she would resolutely turn from the picture, arguing that the time was past for accepting his offer, and that now, whatever the consequences, she must remain in the home she had chosen. She longed intensely to earn some money to help out the situation, thinking how delightful it would be to put ten dollars into her father's hand with the astonishing announcement that it was her very own to do with as she pleased. But, realizing her helplessness in this line, she would resolve again and again to eat as little as possible, and as far as she was able

to insist on wearing her old clothes, and to protest against spending even precious pennies for the pretty things she so loved to wear. But it was the eating question that troubled her more than the dress, for her healthy appetite often tempted her into indulgences which she would afterwards regret.

One noon she so far forgot herself as to ask for a second helping of strawberry shortcake.

"Why," exclaimed her father playfully, "if you keep on at this rate, I shall have to charge you more for board!"

Polly looked up, dropped her fork, and covering her face with her hands broke into tears.

"Thistledown!" cried the Doctor.

"You foolish child!" laughed Mrs. Dudley. "You know father was only in fun!"

But Polly sobbed on, nor could she be induced to eat the piece of shortcake she had wanted.

Dr. Dudley and his wife were puzzled, but Polly did not make matters clearer, only refused to finish her dinner, insisting that she had had enough. Her mother coaxed, the Doctor all but commanded, yet she

silently kept her trouble in her heart, and went miserably to school.

There Patricia met her with the announcement that she and her mother were going to Midvale Springs to spend the summer, having arranged to leave as soon as school should close.

"And we want you to go with us," Patricia went on with eager emphasis, passing her arm cozily around Polly's waist. "You and I can have a room together next to mamma's and it will be too lovely! I lay awake last night thinking of it."

"But I can't —" began Polly.

"You can, too!" contradicted Patricia. "You've got to! I won't let you do anything else! Now say yes right away — there's a dear!" she coaxed, pinching Polly's mouth with a thumb and forefinger, her favorite method of wheedling.

"Cousin Harold's coming for a visit pretty soon," evaded Polly. "I don't know what he would do if I should n't be here when he came."

"Huh!" scorned Patricia, "guess I should n't stay home for a boy! He can come some

other time. I'm your cousin, and I want you, and I'm going to have you! You never do anything I ask you to, and I think you might just for this once!" she pouted.

"Why, Patty, I do everything I can to please you!" protested Polly.

The "Patty" won smiles. It was Patricia's favorite nickname, and she was always pleased when Polly used it.

"You're a darling!" she cooed. "You do everything lovely! And you'll do this for me—I know you will!" she ended archly.

Yet Polly was equally certain in her inmost heart that she should never go to Midvale. To be sure, she reasoned prudently, it would save her board at home, and that was to be desired, but, on the other hand, there must needs be new clothes for a summer's stay at the fashionable Springs, which would more than offset the gain. She would give Patricia no encouragement.

Mrs. Dudley looked with favor on the invitation, although saying she should allow Polly to do as she chose. The Doctor, too, welcomed the plan as a good one, thinking it would be just the change needed for the

little girl, who was growing thin and pale. Still Polly held out against them all, and felt actually homesick to hear so much talk about it. If it had been going with Mrs. Collins and David, why, she would have considered the question. She loved David's sweet, girlish little mother; but of Mrs. Illingworth she had never been fond, and she wondered that her father and mother should wish her to go.

"I'd rather stay here and live on crackers — 'thout any butter," she said miserably to herself, and she began to curtail her meals as much as discreetness and her appetite would allow.

It was only a week to the end of school, and Patricia had been urging her claims, to which Polly had paid small attention, having heard the same talk, with variations, for the last fortnight. But all at once the half-listener grew interested. What was Patricia saying?

"If you'll only go for just one month I'll give you fifty dollars!"

"Your mother would n't let you," argued Polly.

"She would, too!" Patricia declared. "Guess I can do what I want to with my own money! Oh, say, will you go? Will you?"

"Maybe," yielded Polly. "I don't know. I've got to think it over. I do want some money, and I was wishing I could earn some —"

"Oh, then you will! you will! you will!" cried Patricia gleefully. "This is just your chance! Why did n't you tell me before? Oh, I'm so glad I want to stand on my head!"

"I have n't said yet that I'd go," laughed Polly; "only maybe I would."

"But you will! I know the signs!" — and Polly was grabbed in an uncomfortable hug.

Dr. Dudley and his wife were pleased at the turn affairs had taken, although they wondered at Polly's sudden change of mind. Of the offer that was the sole cause of it Polly said nothing. What a joyful surprise it would be when she should come home a month hence with sufficient money to pay the haunting coal bill! The anticipated pleasure of that moment kept her resolution steady.

Yet at times Polly was so sober in the midst of the preparations for her going that

her mother would turn to her with searching eyes, and wonder how she had lost her usual blitheness.

"You are not doing this just to please Patricia?" she asked one twilight, stopping in her task of packing Polly's small trunk to catch her in her arms and hold her solemn little face towards the window.

"Oh, no!" was the tremulous assertion; "I'm not going for Patricia's sake at all — that is, of course, I'm glad to please her; but I want to go! Only I guess" — her eyes filled — "I'm a little lovesick for you and father!"

Mrs. Dudley smiled.

"I know!" she nodded. "I've been homesick beforehand."

"Have you?" Polly brightened. "And did it go off?"

"Oh, yes, after a while!"

"Then I guess I shall get over it soon as I'm really there," she said bravely. "I would n't give it up for anything!"

Yet the end of the pleasant all-day's journey found Polly looking forward to her promised month with a vague uneasiness.

She half wished she had confided in her mother and had let her decide. While listening to Patricia's happy chatter, she wondered whether she had done right in coming, arguing the question back and forth; still so secretly did she carry on her own line of thought that merry Patricia never guessed she was not holding Polly's entire attention.

In the morning things looked different. The charming little village of Midvale Springs, dropped so cozily among the Vermont hills, won Polly's heart at first daylight glance. If father and mother were there, too! But even with the knowledge that they were hundreds of miles away the early days of her visit were spent very happily. There was so much to see, new faces at every turn, merry playmates at all hours, straw rides and barn frolics, beautiful drives alongside tumbling brooks and through deep mountain gorges, — Polly's letters home told of these unfamiliar scenes and pleasures. Mrs. Dudley said to herself that the homesickness must have passed with the journey.

Polly had been at the Springs but a week when she was one of a party to spend the day

at Lazy Lake, twenty miles distant. On her return, in the early twilight, a small figure popped out of the dusk to give her a frantic embrace.

"Harold!" she exclaimed, recovering wits and breath together. "Where did you come from?"

"Fair Harbor," promptly answered the unabashed boy. "Could n't find anybody home at your house, and that feller next door — what's his name? —"

"David Collins?"

"Yes, David — he said you were up here, so I came right along."

At first it was a problem to know how to dispose of the rash little lad; but by dint of certain shifts a room in the hotel was finally provided for him, and he fitted very happily into the gay life there.

The next week another surprise came to Polly, and it was even greater than the advent of Harold.

An automobile had gone to the nearest station, ten miles away, to meet the evening train and fetch back some new boarders — so much the children knew; but as this was

not an unusual occurrence they only wondered mildly if there would be any boys or girls among the coming guests. They had finished their last game of tennis, and were lounging on the piazza steps, when the hotel car was sighted up the dusty road.

"We'd better scoot," advised Carl Webster, "or some of the new folks may agree with old Mrs. Chatterton, that they 'never did see such a raft o' young ones!'"

The imitation of the fidgety little woman's voice and manner was so complete that the others broke into laughter; but nobody moved.

The car was slowing up, and Polly, turning carelessly to look, gave a little cry of astonishment. Then, to the surprise of the rest, she darted down the steps.

"Ilga!—Miss Price!"—her words stopped short, for Ilga was on her feet — was stepping forward! Her face matched her joyful greeting.

In a minute Patricia was there, asking excited questions and begging the invalid to be careful.

"As if I were not crawling!" laughed

Ilga. "Oh, it does seem so splendid to walk! I've got lots of messages for you, Polly. Your father came to the station to see me off — just think of that! Was n't it lovely of him? And your mother made me a long call yesterday! I would n't let anybody tell you a thing about my coming — I wanted to surprise you! You were surprised, were n't you?" she queried anxiously.

"I'm so surprised I can't think," laughed Polly. "Did you know it when I came away — that you were coming, too?"

"We'd just spoken of it, had n't we, Miss Price? It was n't a bit sure then. I was wild to come — just wild!" Ilga dropped into the easy chair placed for her, and drew a long, happy breath.

"Are n't you awfully tired?" questioned Patricia.

"Oh, I guess not! — I don't know. I only know I'm here and it's beautiful! Father and mother are coming next week; won't that be grand?"

So the pleasant talk went on, until Miss Price carried her patient away to supper and rest.

Merry days followed. Polly, remembering the old Ilga and her few school friends, looked delightedly upon the popularity which this subdued, humbled girl was winning. Once such attention might have incited her to overbearing conduct; now it seemed only to make her fairly beam with good-fellowship and happiness. "And she actually loves father!" Polly would smilingly tell herself, secretly rejoicing in the fact; but she rarely spoke of the change even to Patricia. It was enough that the miracle had been wrought. It did not need to be passed about in words.

Although somewhat against his father's wishes, Harold remained for the week which he had started to spend in Fair Harbor; but all his pleading could not make the grudging consent cover a longer time.

With tears in his eyes he bade Polly good-bye.

"If you were only going, too!" he whispered. "Come on, Polly — do!"

"Why, you know I can't!" she returned, half laughingly, half sadly.

He muttered an exulting reply that she could not quite catch, and then the train

came, and he was hustled away, leaving Polly to wonder what he had said.

"It was something about what he was going to do when he was grown up," she mused. "I don't see why he should talk of that now — and here!"

On her return to the hotel, she ran over to the croquet ground that skirted the opposite side of the road. A game was in progress, and for the time Harold faded into the past. Patricia being called to the house, Polly took her place, and she was driving a ball to the last stake when somebody cried out: —

"There's your cousin! What's he coming back for?"

Polly glanced up, to see Harold grinning and waving to her jubilantly.

He jumped from the car as it slowed, and came to meet her.

"How did you get here? I s'posed you were on the way to New York!"

"Had an accident," he answered cheerfully, — "just below the station, and the track was so blocked up they said we could n't get along in hours. I was n't going to stay fooling round there, you bet! I said,

was n't there an auto somewhere that could bring us back to the hotel, and a man asked me what hotel 't was and all about it up here, and he and another man said they 'd get an auto if there was one to be had. So they did — and here I am!"

He wagged his head gleefully.

"I never saw such a boy for pouncing in on people!" laughed Ilga. "But I'm awfully glad you 've come. Was there anybody hurt?"

"Yes, some of 'em. No one killed, they said. 'T was a mighty big smash-up, though! My! you 'd 'a' thought the whole world was going to pieces when we came together! And we had n't been started much more 'n two minutes! Our car tilted over, and I climbed out through the window! I did n't even get a scratch."

"Don't let 's talk about it," begged Polly. "I'm so glad you are n't hurt."

"Yes," agreed Harold; "but I 'd 'a' come back here all the same if I had been, and then pop would 'a' had to let me stay."

The children laughed, all but Polly. She said, with a little pucker of the brows: —

"What a boy!"

Later, as they went up to the hotel, she glanced towards the broad piazza, now dotted with men and women, and her eyes widened in amazement.

"Why, there's Mr. Morrow!"

"Who's he?" queried Harold indifferently.

"Chris Morrow's father — don't you know? The one that gave me the pansy pin."

"Oh! Where is he?"

"Over there by the post, right next to the girl in light pink."

"That's the man I came up with! But his name is n't Morrow — it's Winship. He said so."

"Well, it looks just like him anyway," insisted Polly. "Perhaps it is n't," she added disappointedly.

Before they reached the piazza steps, the stranger arose and went inside.

"It does n't walk like Mr. Morrow," admitted Polly. "But I wish he'd stayed, I wanted to see him nearer."

For several days, however, no opportunity came for observing the man at close range.

In the big dining-hall, even if he chanced to be there at the same time, he sat the entire length of the room away from her, and they did not meet elsewhere. Then, one morning, at a turn of the long piazza, they chanced to come face to face, and Polly, struck by his remarkable resemblance to the father of her friend, could not forbear to speak.

"I beg your pardon," she began, half afraid now that she had actually started, "but are n't you Mr. Morrow, — the one I used to see at the hospital in Fair Harbor?"

A puzzled look swept the man's face. Then he smiled.

"I think you are mistaken, little lady. My name is Winship, Bradford Winship of New York."

"You look almost exactly like him," returned Polly, even now refusing to be quite convinced, although there was not a trace of recognition in the smiling face she was scanning.

"I seem to have two or three doubles around the country," he remarked. "I am continually being taken for somebody or other. Sorry not to have had the previous

pleasure of your acquaintance, but I hope that we may follow up the little we have made."

He left her with a deferential bow, and she ran to tell Patricia and Ilga of her blunder. How Harold would have laughed! But he had left for home as soon as it had been ascertained that the trains were running on time.

The next day, returning to her apartment for a light wrap, after the evening meal, Mrs. Illingworth passed her dressing-table, and stared in amazement. The girls, in their room, heard her peremptory call.

"Patty, have you been meddling with my jewel cases again?"

"No, mamma, I have n't touched them," she answered comfortably.

"Are you sure? Think! Come here quick!"

Patricia sprang to obey. Her mother's voice was tense and sharp. More than once she had made free to appropriate necklaces and bracelets for her own adornment in plays with the children, but this time she was quite innocent of any misbehavior.

"Why! — why!" she gasped, gazing, big-eyed, at the beautiful empty cases, "where are all your jewels? I have n't taken a single thing! Have I, Polly? We were playing tennis early, and then we went to ride, you know. Why, what could —"

But Mrs. Illingworth waited for no more; dashing from the room, she hurried to the office to report her loss.

She was only one of many. While supper was in progress the rooms of the guests had been rifled of money and jewelry to the amount of thousands of dollars. The thief had entered the apartments by means of a skeleton key, for most of the doors had been locked.

"Oh, I wonder if he took my lovely coral bracelet!" cried Patricia, who had followed her mother downstairs.

The girls scampered back, to find their fears true. Patricia's pretty bits of jewelry, as well as Polly's pansy pin, were gone. They were distressed over their loss, but their excitement was a small part of that throughout the hotel.

The authorities were not long in placing

the charge. The men who had accompanied Harold from the railway wreck had vanished, and although they were traced to a neighboring town, there they seemed to be utterly lost.

Perhaps nobody grieved more than did Polly.

"And the man was so pleasant to me!" she mourned. "To think he should go and steal my pretty pin — Chris's present!"

The occurrence actually made her homesick, and she longed for the day when her month should be up. It had been arranged for her to travel in company with an elderly gentleman who must pass through Fair Harbor on his way home, and she would have hoped that his business would hasten his going, only that she had promised the entire month in return for the fifty dollars.

The day was finally set, but nothing was said about the price of her visit, and Polly grew anxious and perturbed. What if Patricia had forgotten! What if she should not get the money after all! To be sure, the month had been for the most part pleasant, still the loss of her precious pin was enough

to make her hate the name of Midvale Springs. Now if she had gained not even the amount of the coal bill by coming! By the last night Polly was in a fever; she could not sleep, while her irresponsible bedfellow lay beside her like a little log.

Shortly before breakfast, Polly, dressed for her journey, appeared in Mrs. Illingworth's room, and with a pleasant good-morning was on her way to the hall, when the lady stopped her.

"Wait a moment, dear!"

Polly turned, to see Patricia's mother opening her purse. Her heart leaped in sudden joy. She had been blaming Patricia for neglect, but now she silently begged her pardon.

"Run and get your hand-bag," Mrs. Illingworth smiled, "I want to put something into it."

Polly fetched it gladly.

"There is fifty dollars, a little present from Patty and me, and I hope you will have as much pleasure in spending it as we have in giving."

Polly thanked her, and then added: —

"I would n't take it, as I told Patricia before I came, only that I want the money for a very special purpose."

Mrs. Illingworth's eyes narrowed, as was their habit in surprise, and she started to speak; but Polly was going innocently on, and the lady glanced keenly at her daughter, who was standing transfixed in the door of her room.

"I was wishing I could earn some," Polly was saying, "when Patty offered this if I would come for a month; so it happened just right. I thank you ever so much, and for my lovely visit beside."

It is doubtful if either the mother or daughter heard much of Polly's grateful little speech. Patricia's face burned with shame at her forgetfulness, and she wondered what her mother would say as soon as Polly was out of hearing.

As for Polly she went blithely on her way, never dreaming that by fortunate chance Mrs. Illingworth's gift came to cover up a bit of negligence.

Fair Harbor was not reached until evening. To Polly's surprise, her father was not

at the station. Her letter, she reasoned, could not have been received. But the road was well-known and the hour was not late, so she took the way to Lady Gay Cottage with a light heart.

The house was dark. Neither father nor mother was on the piazza, as Polly had hoped they would be. She was eager to feel their arms around her. She pushed the bell-button again and again, but there was no answer. It was dismally dark at Colonel Gresham's, too, and not the murmur of a voice came to her as she listened.

"They are all out riding, probably," she explained to herself discouragedly. It was a lonesome home-coming indeed. She walked slowly over to the hammock, and dropped into it. Anyway she was at home — that was a comfort.

"And they'll come pretty soon," she thought gladly. "They never stay out late."

She was tired, after her long day on the hot, dusty train. She leaned wearily back among the soft cushions. Yes, home was the best place in the whole world.

Two hours later an automobile stopped at

Lady Gay Cottage. Dr. Dudley and his wife stepped out, there were good-nights, then the two went up to the house together.

"Going in?" queried the Doctor. "Guess I'll stay out here awhile, it is too pleasant to go to bed."

He unlocked the door, and then, left to himself, went over to the dark corner where the hammock swung. There he suddenly stopped, with a soft ejaculation.

The sleeper did not stir.

Putting his hand gently under her neck, he thought to take her in his arms. How surprised she would be when she awoke! But she spoiled his plan by suddenly opening her eyes.

With a glad cry she nestled her head on his shoulder. How dear it was to be home again! Mother heard the voices, and came out, which meant more kisses and happy greetings.

Polly was talking fast and eagerly about the exciting events of her visit, when she thought of the money in her purse.

"Oh, I forgot!" she broke off, and dived into her little hand-bag.

"There," she said, her voice low and tense, "is the money to pay the coal bill! Mrs. Illingworth — I mean Patricia — gave it to me for going with her."

"But, Thistledown," objected the Doctor whimsically, "that coal bill was paid long ago, — besides —"

"Oh, dear," she broke in, "I wanted to pay it myself! I wanted to help you!" She hid her face against his coat. "I would n't have gone only for that. Patty said she'd give me fifty dollars if I would."

In a flash Dr. Dudley saw it all, — her sudden turn regarding the summer trip, her brave fight with homesickness. Involuntarily his arms tightened around her. Must he make her feel that her sacrifice had been in vain?

"You say that Patricia gave you the money when you came away?"

"No, father, it was Mrs. Illingworth that gave it to me — this morning. She said it was a present from both of them. But Patty had promised it to me."

"I understand. Well, there are other ways, Thistledown, where your money can

help, if you wish. You know we have not used our 'wedding' car for a good while, because I have n't been able to spare enough for a needed tire. Now, if you like, you shall buy the new tire, and then we will have some rides. How will that do?"

"Oh, splendid!" she cried. "I'm so glad! I did want to help! I was afraid for a minute that you were not going to let me keep the money; but a present has to be kept, does n't it? Only this was n't exactly a present, if she did call it so. I'm glad you did n't mean that." She drew a long, satisfied breath.

The Doctor smiled across at his wife over Polly's curls, and her eyes told him he had decided in the wisest way.

They were still talking when Colonel Gresham and his family drove in.

Polly called a cheery, "Hullo, David!" and then, of course, they all had to come over and tell her how glad they were to see her.

It was late before the mother could get her nestling snug for the night; but Polly was at home again, and nobody cared.

CHAPTER XIX

TWO LETTERS

A WEEK after Polly's return, Lady Gay Cottage was sold. Polly brought the news from Colonel Gresham's, the Colonel having heard it downtown.

"Now what shall we do?" she questioned, atop of the announcement. "Colonel Gresham says we can all come over there."

Dr. Dudley laughed. So did his wife, but she grew grave almost at once.

"Very likely we can stay on just the same," was the Doctor's cheerful opinion. "Martin Clapp is n't going to give up his new home and move his family in here; so don't worry about it."

It was as Dr. Dudley prophesied, the tenants could remain, but with this difference, — the rent was raised five dollars a month. The Doctor made light of it; still Polly knew by her mother's face that it would mean a harder pinch on other things.

If only they had n't bought that new tire! It was delightful to be riding again in the Colonel's beautiful present, yet the shadow that often she detected on her mother's face she attributed to this new trouble, and it worried her. What made it worse, she worried in secret. The thought intruded while she was playing with Leonora and David, it haunted her dreams by night. She began to wonder again if she ought to have gone to live with Uncle Maurice. The question was still undecided when something occurred that seemed to make matters clearer.

She had been up to Mrs. Jocelyn's and was returning home late in the afternoon. As she came in view of the hospital she noticed a small boy standing by the gate. On nearer approach the lad's delicate profile grew familiar, and suddenly she darted forward, crying joyfully: —

"Chris! Oh, Chris!"

He turned weakly, took a step to meet her, and then throwing out his hands dropped to the sidewalk.

With a little scream, Polly was down beside him, moaning: —

"Oh, he's dead! he's dead!"

But in a moment, to her relief, his eyes opened, and he murmured, "Polly!"

A physician, driving up to the hospital entrance, took the boy in his arms, and carried him inside.

The office was empty, but presently Dr. Dudley returned to find a patient on his couch, and Polly acting as nurse.

"Daddy's gone away," the lad explained, "and he sent word to have me come right up here and see you. I've got a letter" — fumbling for the inner pocket of his coat. Finally, with Polly's help, he brought forth a closely sealed envelope directed to Dr. Dudley.

The physician laid it aside until his patient could be made more comfortable, and at once administered a light restorative.

Chris had not been well for a good while, he admitted, and had been separated from "daddy" much of the time since leaving Fair Harbor. In the brief little note that had come to him, his father had not said where he was going, but as business would be likely to keep him away for some months he directed

him to come to Dr. Dudley and deliver the letter in person.

"Yes, we will have him up in the convalescent ward," the physician replied, in response to Polly's question, and he stepped to the telephone, to order a bed prepared for him at once.

Polly saw a shadow of anxiety on the pale little face, and began to reassure him.

"It is lovely up there, and you'll get well right away and have such good times. I'm over here every day, sometimes two or three times a day — I shall be now to see you."

And so the lonely heart was comforted.

The day was full of work for Dr. Dudley, and Mr. Morrow's letter stayed unopened in his pocket until his evening rounds had been made. In his first leisure moment, he cut the envelope and skimmed the closely written pages. He read them twice before he laid them down. Then, leaning back in his chair, he pondered the strange situation. Finally he took up the letter and read it through again. It bore neither date nor address nor signature, and began abruptly.

DEAR DOCTOR, —

Here I am! — up for two years, and God only knows what will become of my boy! He is, as you know, an abnormally sensitive child, who will grieve for "daddy" to the breaking of his heart, unless you open your heart and home and take him in. You were good to him once, and he loves you and your Polly. I am sure he would be happy with you. Will you do this kindness for me? No, not for me, — a man who has not the slightest claim upon you and who would not deserve it if he had, — but for the sake of his angel mother, for the sake of the poor little kid himself, perhaps you will not refuse.

Chris does not know where I am, and he must not be told, — *he must never know.* When my two years are up, we will go somewhere and begin life all over again. I have had enough of this infernal business, and am going to live straight as soon as I get another chance. In the six years I have been at it I have been lucky, many times slipping out of the very teeth of the law, until they called me "Slippery 'Chard." I thought I was smart enough to elude anybody; but this

last job was my undoing. My partner was too fond of talk and whiskey — he gave us away easy, and we're both out of it for these two years. I ought to have known better than to take him on.

It cut me up to have to lie to your little girl when she recognized me at Midvale — I guess I deserve all that's coming to me! I'm sorry about that pin Chris gave to Polly. The other fellow went through those rooms, and, of course, took the pansy with the rest. I knew it soon as I spied it, and was going to send it back to her; but they did n't give me time enough, and now it is gone. Perhaps you will think it is just as well, for it was swiped to start with. Buy her another, something pretty, and I'll foot the bill. You need n't be afraid of the money — it is as honest as yours. It was left the boy by his mother, and I have never touched it, so there's quite a neat little sum now. Charge me whatever you please for the kid's board. I'm willing to leave it to you, and I will see that you are paid promptly every month. If you'll only take care of him, and bring him up right, and not let him know that his fa-

ther is a criminal, I will bless you to my last breath — as if my blessing could be worth anything to such a man as you! Well, the best it is you shall have it, and that is all I can do. If it had n't been for Chris and his faith in me I should have gone to hell long ago — I've been down to the gates, as it was. It is n't the fault of my rearing, — my folks were all right, they trained me, they educated me, they loved me. I am the first to sully the name, but I've kept the name itself out of the mud as much as possible. Write to Peter Connell, New York, and I shall get the word.

Think what it would mean to you to be shut away from your little girl, never to look on her for two long years, with no decent friend to care for her — and then keep my little Chris! Oh, Doctor, keep him, and don't let him know about me!

Good-bye.

Richard Morrow was wise when in his extremity he turned to Dr. Dudley. The Doctor's heart was big and always ready to open its door to anybody in distress of body or

mind. Of course, little Chris stayed — at the hospital until he was strong again, then in the physician's own home.

The lad grieved for his father, Polly often finding him in some obscure corner reading over with tears his latest note from "daddy."

"I can't make it seem right that he does n't come to see me just once," he complained to Polly. "I should think he might get away from his business for a little tiny while, — ten minutes or so, — even if he went back on the next train. It is n't a bit like daddy, — not a single bit!"

And Polly, able to understand it no better than he, would strive to comfort him.

Sometimes Mrs. Dudley wondered if, after all, it would not have been really kinder to tell the little lad the truth.

Nothing was said to Polly about the boy's board, and this gave her an additional anxiety. He had now the appetite of a young convalescent who was rapidly gaining strength, and Polly watched his plate at mealtime with dismay in her heart. She would zealously try to curb her own appetite, but found it a difficult task, and finally, in

desperation, she made a weightier decision, and then ate what she pleased and as much as seemed proper for the short time that remained. For, at last, after days of argument with herself, when both sides of the question were, as she honestly believed, fairly dealt with, Polly concluded to write to Uncle Maurice.

The time had been set for a Wednesday morning, but was postponed until afternoon, and then three o'clock came before Polly went about it. Chris had proposed going over to the convalescent ward for a little visit; but Polly was in no visiting mood, so she had allowed him to go alone.

Slowly she mounted the stairs to her own room. Even now she was tempted to put off writing until to-morrow. Perhaps so long afterwards Uncle Maurice would not be ready to welcome her. But in her heart she knew this was false reasoning, and with a catch in her breath she sat down by her small writing desk, and pulled out paper and envelopes.

It was some minutes before she started to write.

DEAR UNCLE MAURICE, —

I thought when you were here and when I was in New York that I could never accept your invitation to come and live with you. But I have changed my mind — no, I have not exactly changed my mind, because I don't want to go as bad as ever —

"I'm afraid that is n't very polite," Polly thought ruefully, drew a deep sigh, and took a fresh sheet.

DEAR UNCLE MAURICE, —

When you were here, last spring, I thought I could not ever come to live with you, but now it seems best for me to accept your invitation. Perhaps you don't want me by this time, and if you don't, please say so, because it won't make any difference to me — I mean I shall be glad not —

Polly stopped suddenly. That would never do. She put the sheet aside, and began anew.

DEAR UNCLE MAURICE, —

I wonder if you still want me to come and live with you. Because if you do, I will —

At the fatal word, Polly's lip quivered, her pen turned, and a big splash of ink fell right in the middle of the fair page. She did n't care. There were other splashes, too. Tears were sprinkling the paper and blotting her lines.

"Oh, I — can't go! — I can't! — I can't!" she sobbed softly.

Presently she grew quiet, courage came back, determination strengthened. She began again to write. But tears brimmed her eyes and spoilt the letter once more. It was disheartening work.

At last the sorry words were down, and Polly felt that all happiness for this world was over.

"I hope I shall die quick," she said to herself. "Then I can go and live with mamma."

She swallowed hard. Even the prospect of Heaven was poor consolation just now.

With great painstaking she directed the envelope and placed the stamp. She could not bring herself to seal it; that could wait until the last moment. It seemed to her she should then be irrevocably bound to do the

thing she had promised. It would be the final link in this dreadful chain.

A passing glance in the small mirror sent her to bathe her hot, tear-stained face before venturing down to the letter-box on the corner. She dallied with the towel until there was no further excuse, she brushed her hair into unaccustomed smoothness; finally she went slowly over to her little desk, and took up the envelope, at last sealing it hurriedly, lest her courage should utterly fail. She would slip out to the letter-box, and have the miserable business done with as soon as possible.

She had reached the door, her hand on the knob, when she heard a step in the corridor — her mother's step. She halted guiltily, with quick intuition thrusting the letter behind her.

"Polly! are you here? May I come in?"

Hesitantly Polly opened the door.

"Hurry off your dress, dear! Mrs. Jocelyn has sent for us to come up to dinner. She says she has been trying to get us by telephone for the last hour."

"Chris is over at the hospital," volun-

teered Polly, slyly slipping her letter, face down, under her glove-box before running to fetch a fresh white frock.

"No, he has just come home with me," Mrs. Dudley replied. "He said he could n't persuade you to go out this afternoon. Don't you feel well? Your cheeks are flushed, — and your pulse is a little quick," her fingers on the small wrist.

"Oh, I'm all right!" insisted Polly, forcing a smile, and pulling away, to guard against further questioning.

Why should this invitation have come just now — to make it harder, oh, so much harder, for her to leave them all!

CHAPTER XX

MRS. JOCELYN'S DINNER-PARTY

LEONORA met Polly at the door, slipping ahead of the maid to catch her in an ecstatic embrace, and to let go a joyful whisper in her ear.

"Come right up to my room! I've got something lovely to tell you!"

Leonora's face was so radiant that Polly was all at once reminded of that morning at the hospital when she had first heard of her friend's adoption. What could have happened now to make her look like that?

"Say," began Leonora, bubbling with news, "Colonel Gresham and David and his mother are here!"

Polly's eyes grew big, and her lips puckered into a "Why!" of astonishment.

"And, oh, there's lots more!" went on Leonora mysteriously. "But I'm not to tell! I promised mother I would n't — only just that. You'd know it anyway when you

go down. Oh, Polly Dudley, I'm so tickled — there! mother told me not to say that word again! — well, happy, I mean, only it does n't sound so perfectly splendid as I feel. It seems as if I could n't stand it!"

"I can't imagine what it is," mused Polly wonderingly.

At which Leonora whirled her round and round in a rapturous hug, stopping suddenly to say they must go downstairs.

After Polly had greeted her hostess and the other guests, she found that a conversation was going on about the hospital.

"Yes," the Doctor was saying, "we need more room, especially for children. We had to refuse two little girls yesterday and a boy the day before; there was absolutely no place where we could put them."

"Then you think there is demand for a children's hospital in the city?" asked Mrs. Jocelyn tentatively.

"A big demand," the Doctor smiled.

"I'm glad to hear that," was the quiet reply, "for I wish to build one."

Polly sat up straight and still, her astonished eyes fixed on Mrs. Jocelyn.

"You could hardly put your money to better use," responded Dr. Dudley.

"So I think; but I wanted your opinion before going further. I have the refusal of the Beecher property west of me; that will give me the whole block. My plan is to put up two buildings, one on each side of my house, — a little to the rear, so as not to cut off the sunlight, — and let this be the connecting link. The head physician can live here, and both parts will be easy of access — what do you say?"

"Admirable plan," agreed the Doctor. "But, Mrs. Jocelyn, have you estimated the cost? There'll be practically no end to the expense of keeping up such an establishment."

"I don't care anything about that," was the indifferent reply. "There's plenty to draw from." Her face was suddenly swept by a shadow of sadness. "For a long time I have wanted to do something in memory of Lloyd, — something for children, — and this seems to be the most feasible of any plan I've thought of. I don't want it called a hospital either. There is a prejudice among

a certain class against the very name. Some people will let their children die, rather than send them to a hospital. So Leonora and I have been choosing — what do you think of this, 'The Children's House of Joy'?"

"Is n't that perfectly beautiful?" whispered Leonora to Polly, catching her hand with a little squeeze.

And so Polly missed her father's answer; but she knew from the comments of the others that it must have been in favor of the proposed name.

"This brings us to another question," resumed the hostess. "Dr. Dudley, do you know of a suitable man for the head of 'The House of Joy'?"

"I do," was the instant reply. "His name came to me a moment ago, — Dr. Lanier. You probably know him by reputation. He is the man you ought to have; there is no better surgeon in the country, and he has specialized on diseases of children. I think, too, he can be induced to come."

"Have you his address?"

The Doctor drew a package of papers from an inner pocket, and ran them through.

Then he dived into a second pocket, finally stopping at a card which he handed his questioner.

"I will call him up," she decided, and disappeared in the hallway.

For a while the low sound of a voice filled up the spaces of desultory talk in the library. Then Mrs. Jocelyn came back, her eyes so sparkling that Polly thought she knew what the answer had been.

"Don't everybody ask the same question!" laughed the lady, pausing mischievously to note the inquiring faces. "If you wish to know whether he is coming, I will tell you. I did n't invite him! I did n't intend to invite him! I only wished to talk over some few little essentials — such as salary and so on. No," she continued impressively, meeting the Doctor's mystified expression with a knowing smile, "I don't want Dr. Lanier for the head of 'The House of Joy,' however suited he may be for the place. I have set my heart on another, a younger man, but one equally well fitted for the position. He is modest of his attainments, yet he is already being sought for

outside of his own city. He has made a specialty of children's diseases, and has been wonderfully successful in his field of work. I know he would make the new hospital indeed a House of Joy to thousands of little ones. I am speaking of Dr. Robert Dudley, for he is the man I want, and if I cannot have him I won't build any hospital!"

Everybody had turned towards the Doctor, who sat motionless in the sudden hush, the color brightening in his face, his eyes bent on the arm of his chair. Then he looked up.

"My dear Mrs. Jocelyn," he began, — and Polly afterwards confided to David that his voice sounded so queer and shaky, she was afraid he was going to cry, — "you have paid me the greatest honor that —"

"Did n't I tell you there was something perfectly splendid?" whispered Leonora softly, in Polly's ear, unable to keep still a moment longer. "I knew it all the time! I knew she wanted him! And that is n't all! Oh, my! — no!"

The most of the Doctor's little speech was quite lost to Polly, for when Leonora

stopped, everybody seemed to be talking at once. Then, in a flash, Polly connected two things, — the position her father was to have and the "salary" of which Mrs. Jocelyn had talked with the great surgeon. There would be no more "pinch," — what need would there be of her going to Uncle Maurice? And the letter was n't mailed! She wanted to jump up and shout it at the top of her voice. But instead she stole across to her father, and slipped her hand in his. Then, suddenly, her throat ached with the joy of it all, and she was close to tears, keeping them back only by a mighty effort.

"Polly! Polly! come here quick!" called Leonora.

And Polly went, just as Mrs. Jocelyn was saying: —

"No, I shall not need my house any longer. Thirty years ago David Gresham and I had a quarrel, and we think thirty years is quite long enough for a quarrel to last, — too long, in fact! — so we have made up, as the children say. I shall be very glad to leave all the worry of housekeeping to Mrs. Collins, for I am tired of it."

At this moment she arose to greet a gentleman who was entering the room. Polly recognized him as the Rector of St. Paul's, and before she realized what was going on, Mrs. Jocelyn and Colonel Gresham were standing together, and the marriage ceremony was in progress.

"What do you think now? Are n't you awfully surprised?" bubbled the irrepressible Leonora, as the first congratulations were spoken. "We're coming to live next to you, right in the house with David, and Colonel Gresham will be my father!"

It was after the informal dinner, when the Colonel had the four around him, — Polly and Leonora on either knee, and David and Chris each on an arm of his chair, — that the "lovely thing," as Leonora called it, happened.

"Polly, I'm going to have some roses on my piazza next summer," declared the Colonel, "and I reckon I'll let my quartette pick them out for me."

"I shall choose Silver Moons," decided Polly at once.

"I will be ready for them, thorns and all,"

he laughed. "But there are no thorns on these roses," taking from his pocket four small jewel-cases of bright blue leather.

The children opened them eagerly. Polly's and Leonora's contained gold rings exactly alike and of exquisite workmanship, a little rose spray encircling the top, and in the heart of the open flower a tiny spark of dew. The boys' scarf-pins were of similar design, being headed by a miniature full-blown rose.

"I can never thank you enough for all the beautiful things you give me," purred Polly, caressing the ring on her finger.

"But think what you have done for me!" exclaimed the Colonel. "You have let me into the secret of the rose and the thorn."

THE END